

NATURE'S PATRONS: PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT
AND POWERFUL ENVIRONMENTALISMS

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In this dissertation, I examine the role of private sector engagement in environmental governance. The relationship between mainstream environmentalism and the private sector has moved from one of general hostility to one of constructive engagement in recent times. As a result, the traditional distinctions between environmental non-governmental organizations and private corporations have become blurred, making way for public-private hybrids, facilitated by frameworks of philanthropy, sponsorship, and corporate social responsibility. Connected to these broader reconfigurations in environmental governance are simultaneous alterations in the normative framework of mainstream environmentalism. Ideologically, environmental policy and neoliberalism are now intertwined, entangling assumptions about nature and culture, and reflected in the popularization of environmental protection mechanisms that are deeply embedded in the values of the market economy. Analyzing particular examples of such engagements, and informed by Gramscian theory, I analyze the connections between rising corporate presence in mainstream environmentalism and broader normative and practical change, focusing, in particular, on the frameworks of ecomodernism and the Green Economy. I argue that contemporary private sector engagement in environmentalism leads to the support, production and construction of powerful environmentalisms: environmental ideologies and practices that gain power from, not in spite of, prevailing dominant interests. As such, these powerful environmentalisms tend to produce and reproduce elite processes of capitalist production and prioritize instrumental norms of human-nature relations, while marginalizing others. I conclude by outlining suggestions in support of a democratic environmental politics that

represents and recognizes a more diverse array of actors, human-nature relationships, and frameworks of environmental care.

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By

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

He watched the news. Same as yesterdays. The General Crisis, coming along nicely. Nothing new except the commercials full of sly art and eco-porn. Scenes of the Louisiana bayous, strange birds in slow motion flight, cypress trees bearded Spanish moss. Above the primeval scene, the voice of Power spoke, reeking with sincerity, in praise of itself, the Exxon Oil Company – its tidiness, its fastidious care for all things wild, its concern for human needs.

Edward Abbey

Edward Abbey's novel *The Monkeywrench Gang* was published in 1975, a time when much environmental activism in the United States demanded sweeping reform of modern capitalism. The story tells of four, misfit "eco-warriors" protecting the American West from industrial development by acts of sabotage and violence against machinery, including tearing down billboards, pouring sand in bulldozers, etc. Towards the end of the story, one of the characters, George Hayduke, appears to be shot by police officers in an attempt to escape as the group are caught mid-sabotage. Despite the less than heroic ending, the remaining three are undeterred in their radical vision going forward. The revolutionary spirit lives on.

Depictions of environmental activism are often like this: as radical, peripheral action, intent on societal and institutional upheavals. Indeed, this account is partly accurate for much environmental protest. Although a far cry from the fictional radicalism taking place in Abbey's novels, many place-based movements all around the world assume transformative agendas, often on the basis of necessity, and operate largely on the margins of the political process.

Mainstream environmentalism, however, as practiced and represented in leading environmental and conservation organizations, global international conferences, and governmental bodies, is markedly, and increasingly, of a different nature. Commentators have noted, for example, a growing institutionalization of environmentalism, especially in the global

North, as environmental agendas tilt ever closer to elite and corporate interests and environmental actors and groups adopt market mechanisms of ecological protection founded on models of capitalist accumulation and the creation of environmental commodities.¹ The latter is reflected clearly in novel, ecomodern frameworks of environmental governance, such as the Green Economy, neoliberal environmentalism, and new conservation, all of which currently enjoy significant support by many of the leading environmental groups and are promoted extensively in global environmental conferences.²

The transformation of mainstream environmentalism, from, what Kenneth MacDonald calls a “politics of hope to a politics of containment” has coincided with an ever-growing fluidity of boundaries between “public” and “private” in the sphere of environmental governance.³ As the relationship between environmentalism and the private sector has gradually moved from one of hostility to one of constructive engagement, the traditional distinctions between public environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private corporations have dissipated, making way for public-private *hybrids*, facilitated by frameworks of philanthropy, cause-related marketing and corporate social responsibility. This is made manifest on both an institutional and practical level. Institutionally, private sector actors, such as CEOs of large corporations, increasingly occupy roles in leading positions in environmental and conservation groups, sometimes outnumbering those actors with scientific and technical backgrounds, as well

¹ See Kenneth Iain MacDonald, “Grabbing ‘Green:’ Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and the Production of the Green Economy,” *Human Geography* 6, no. 1 (2013): 44-62; William Adams, “Sleeping with the Enemy? Biodiversity Conservation, Corporations, and the Green Economy,” *Political Ecology* 24 (2017): 243-25; George Holmes, Biodiversity for Billionaires: Capitalism, Conservation, and the Role of Philanthropy in Selling/Saving Nature,” *Development and Change* 43, no. 1 (2012): 185-203.

² See George Sessions, “Deep Ecology, New Conservation, and the Anthropocene Worldview,” *Trumpeter* 30, no. 2 (2014): 106-114; Adams, “Sleeping with the Enemy? Biodiversity Conservation, Corporations, and the Green Economy.”

³ MacDonald, “Grabbing ‘Green:’ Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and the Production of the Green Economy.”

as provide vital funding and partnership on ecological projects.⁴ Additionally, private sector groups, such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, now have growing influence and are major stakeholders in global environmental conferences.⁵ This fluidity is witnessed even further on a practical level as the language of “green” has traversed beyond the boundary of environmental organizations and into the corporate domain, just as the language and practices of the business sector have become more common in many environmental groups.⁶

Thus far, however, the connections between the increase of private engagement in environmentalism and the growth in popularity of market-based, ecomodern frameworks in environmentalism remains under-explored. This is surprising for a couple of reasons. First, the rise of market-based frameworks and instrumental environmental ethics coincide, generally speaking, with the growth in ecophilanthropy and private sector engagement. Second, philanthropy, and other forms of private engagement, have been demonstrated, in other contexts, to have a normative effects on its recipients, including social movements in a broader sense.⁷ In this dissertation, then, I seek to understand the consequences of corporate presence in mainstream environmentalism, specifically addressing the connections between eco-philanthropy, private sector engagement, and broader normative change in environmental discourse and politics. I argue, ultimately, that contemporary private sector engagement leads to the support, production, and construction of certain types of environmentalism that are market-

⁴ George Holmes, “Biodiversity for Billionaires: Capitalism, Conservation, and the Role of Philanthropy in Selling/Saving Nature,” *Development and Change*, 43, no. 1 (2012): 185-203.

⁵ William K. Carroll, “Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in a Global Field,” *Studies in Social Justice* 1, no. 1 (2017): 36-66.

⁶ Holmes, Biodiversity for Billionaires: Capitalism, Conservation, and the Role of Philanthropy in Selling/Saving Nature.”

⁷ This is discussed in more detail in chapter 2. See Tim Bartley, “How Foundations Shape Social Movements: The Construction of an Organizational Field and the Rise of Forestry Certification,” *Social Problems* 54, no. 3 (2007): 229-255.

friendly, instrumental, and do not challenge dominant mechanisms of capitalist production. In short, private engagement leads to powerful environmentalisms: environmental ideologies and practices that get their power *from*, not in spite of, prevailing dominant interests; and are actively reproduced by individuals and institutions that benefit most from the status quo. The broader framework of ecomodernism, and the related discourse of the Green Economy, are discussed as examples of such powerful environmentalisms.

As my goal is to understand the relations between the moral, political, and the economic, I draw on understandings of ideology, and in particular, on Antonio Gramsci's notions of hegemony and counter-hegemony to provide some guidance. Grounded in particular examples of private sector engagement, I analyze whether some forms of private sector engagement in the politics of environmentalism can be understood as a form of hegemony, where corporate action attempts to contain oppositional environmentalism by controlling what Gramsci calls the "war of position;" in this case, the ideological terrain of the environmental movement.⁸ I conclude, ultimately, that powerful environmentalisms, as well as from having internal problems as a result of inherent contradictions and conflicts of interests, can also, and perhaps more importantly, have a marginalizing effect on other expressions of environmental care and protection.

Chapters Overview

This dissertation is split roughly into three parts. In chapters two and three, I focus on social movements, philanthropy, and corporate social responsibility. In chapter two, I analyze the practice of philanthropy, detailing its origins and some critical and positive responses. In addition, I outline some of the theories relating to social movements, focusing, in particular, on

⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

some differences between Resource Mobilization and New Social Movement theory. I conclude by exploring the concept of channeling in social movement scholarship: the process of private patronage channeling social movements away from radical objectives towards more incremental goals. In chapter three, I focus on some of the underlying normative frameworks of philanthropy and corporate social responsibility, analyzing the ethic of stewardship in particular. I argue that the stewardship ethic underlines both traditional philanthropy and contemporary corporate social responsibility and serves to depoliticize corporate action and increase corporate sovereignty.

In chapters 4 and 5, I focus on examples of private sector engagement in environmentalism under the framework of corporate social responsibility and ecophilanthropy, more broadly. In chapter 4, I outline the rise of private sector engagement in environmental groups and the politics of environmentalism. I maintain that despite tendencies towards characterizing the alliances between public environmental groups and private corporations as either pragmatic or greenwashing, they are often more closely related to what Bill Adams describes as “Faustian bargains,” in that engagements such as these usually entail transactions between deeply different power dynamics, where one party benefits more than the other.⁹ Informed by a Gramscian analysis, I explore whether private sector engagement in the politics of environmentalism can be understood as a form of hegemony, where private sector actions contain oppositional environmentalism by controlling what Gramsci calls the “war of position;” in this case, the ideological terrain of the environmental movement. I analyze the work of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) as one possible illustration of this process. In chapter 5, I investigate the representation of nature emerging from private-public partnerships, and in service of novel, market-oriented, environmental agendas. In particular, I

⁹ Adams, “Sleeping With The Enemy: Biodiversity, Corporations and the Green Economy.”

analyze a recent media campaign from Conservation International, called “Nature is Speaking,” in order to ascertain the way in which nature is conceptually produced in novel forms of environmental governance.

In chapter 6 and 7, I focus on powerful environmentalisms in more detail, concentrating on ecomodernism as a general framework. In chapter six, I analyze the extent to which the theory and practice of ecomodernism is reflective of an infiltration of *certain kinds* of interests and actors within the framework, and within environmentalism more generally. In particular, I discuss whether hegemonic ontologies regarding humans and nature, influenced by the presence of elite actors in the production and reproduction of ecomodernism, may serve as both a limiting factor for the manifestation of alternative forms of environmental protection and social well-being. In chapter 7, I compare two environmental manifestos that were published in 2015: “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” written by Ted Nordhaus and others, and “Laudato Si,” written by Pope Francis. I demonstrate that both manifestos put forth two radically different visions of environmental care and conceptualizations of ideal human-nature relations. I assert, ultimately, that although most critical responses in environmental ethics focus on inherent contradictions in normative environmental frameworks, it is also important to investigate questions of power and political economy, specifically addressing the kinds of resources afforded to different environmental ideologies and the potential and consequent marginalization of others. I conclude by outlining suggestions in support of a democratic environmental politics that represents and recognizes a more diverse array of actors, human-nature relationships, and frameworks of ecological care.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND PHILANTHROPY: THE “CHANNELING” PROCESS

Recent developments in the global economy has led to enormous growth in multinational corporations. Currently, out of the hundred largest economies in the world, fifty one are corporations.¹⁰ In the United States alone, it has been reported that large firms control about one third of the country's wealth and for the first time in history, there are 2,043 billionaires that, in total, have a net worth of \$7.71 trillion.¹¹

The corporate sector is also increasingly engaged in philanthropic pursuits. In October 2010, approximately forty U.S. billionaires signed a “Giving Pledge,” in which they promised to donate at least half of their wealth to philanthropic foundations.¹² Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, pledged on a 2016 Facebook post to donate 99 percent of his fortune over his lifetime. Bill Gates and Warren Buffet have collectively donated approximately \$62 billion to poverty reduction goals.¹³ Other leading philanthropists, many of whom are based in Silicon Valley, have developed a collective action framework to tackle the problem of poverty known as the “California Consensus,” which attempts to reduce overall poverty by “applying innovation, technology and modern management methods.”¹⁴

Much of this wealth is directed towards organizations that support and advocate for causes such as poverty reduction, environmental health, and social justice. As a result of

¹⁰ Sarah Anderson and John Cavanagh, “The Rise of Global Corporate Power,” *Corporate Watch* (2011), <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/221/47211.html>.

¹¹ Barry Ritholtz, “Map of World Billionaires by Country and by Origin of Wealth – The Big Picture,” 26 December, 2016, <http://ritholtz.com/2016/12/map-world-billionaires-country-origin/>

¹² Behrooz Morvaridi, “Capitalist Philanthropy and Hegemonic Partnerships,” *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 7 (2012): 1191–1210, p.1192.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

increased capital moving from the private sector to social causes, scholarly attention to philanthropy and its relationship to social movements have increased, with particular interest in how philanthropic resources affects the objectives and institutional structures of social movement organizations (and social movements in general).¹⁵ Critical analysts have maintained that private patronage leads to a channeling of social movements away from radical objectives towards more incremental goals.¹⁶ Although accounts of how this process occurs remains underdeveloped, existing research points to three mechanisms in particular. First, foundations and private actors select more moderate organizations to fund that do not threaten large-scale institutional change.¹⁷ Subsequently, these organizations, as a result of greater resources, become more dominant in the movement overall. Second, private patronage leads to professionalization of grassroots mobilization, leading to structural changes.¹⁸ Third, scholars point to a process of “field building,” where foundations and private actors being critical agents in the construction of fields of activity, each of which operate under certain norms, expectations, and values, and serve to facilitate certain kinds of social movement mobilization.¹⁹

Although these analyses are critical for understanding the ways in which funding affects social movement, their focus is predominantly on institutional aspects and objectives, rather than

¹⁵ John Silk, “Caring At A Distance: Gift Theory, Aid Chains and Social Movements,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 5, no. 2 (2004).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ J. Craig Jenkins, “Channeling Social Protest: Foundation Patronage of Contemporary Social Movements,” in Walter Powell and Elizabeth Clemens, ed., *Private Action and the Public Good*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998), 202-16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Tim Bartley, “How Foundations Shape Social Movements: The Construction of an Organizational Field and The Rise of Forestry Certification,” *Social Problems* 54, no. 3 (2007): 229-255.

on underlying normative change. I conclude with some thoughts on the connections between money, philanthropy, and ethical realignments in social movement mobilization.

Philanthropy

In 1875, Thomas Wentworth Higgins observed that the word *philanthropy* had appeared for the first time in an English speaking publication in *The Guide to Tongues*, published in 1828.²⁰ It was described as “Philanthropie; Humanitae, a loving of man” and the author of the publication, John Dryden, described that he had used the word only because there was no precise translation for the Greek original.²¹

Although the term was popularized during the Enlightenment, it was not until the nineteenth century that it became of common use. It referred, generally speaking, to “love of man, charity, benevolence, humanitarianism, social reform.”²² Citing one example, Curli discusses a well-known philanthropist at the time, Boston bootmaker John Augustus, who was given the label on account of his “help to the helpless and love to the unlovely;”²³ more specifically, his work as a voluntary probation officer, saving hundreds from lengthy jail time. Philanthropists such as Augustus, however, were not always approved of. As noted by Curli, the term, *philanthropist*, sometimes conjured images of an intrusive do-gooder, represented clearly

²⁰ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *The Word Philanthropy: Freedom and Fellowship in Religion* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1875).

²¹ Merle Curli, “American Philanthropy and the National Character,” *American Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1958): 420-437, p. 420.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

in a piece of advice given by old Count Gorowski to one woman: “Marry thief! Marry murderer! But never marry philanthropist!”²⁴

Generally speaking, however, the term *philanthropy* has implied, and has been associated with, benevolence and altruism. The positive perception of the term only increased as the nineteenth century came to a close, as an emerging industrialist class made philanthropic activity a routine state of affairs, instituting giving as a fundamental part of business life, and further, a moral necessity. Business people such as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie established philanthropic foundations through which they donated large portions of their fortune to causes such as education, housing, and healthcare. Such was the extent of the charitable sentiments of the emerging industrialist class that the period was deemed the “golden age of philanthropy.” In addition to an increase in generosity, the actions of these turn-of-the-century philanthropists led to a shift in philanthropic activity away from a predominantly unorganized series of almsgiving, to a structured business on its own terms, run by hired philanthropic advisors and operating under well-defined objectives.

Currently, we are said to be in a second golden age of philanthropy.²⁵ Philanthropic donations in the United States have increased in all sectors, and have grown steadily since the 1970s.²⁶ A report from Paul Schervish and John Havens at Boston College Center on Wealth and Philanthropy estimate \$6.3 trillion of bequests to charity between 2007 and 2061.²⁷ It is common to see news headlines celebrating super donations, in addition to philanthropists “stepping up” in

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ James M. Ferris, “Is This a New Golden Age of Philanthropy: An Assessment of a Changing Landscape,” *Voluntary Sector Review* 7, no. 3 (2016): 315-324.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ John J. Havens and Paul G. Schervish, “A Golden Age of Philanthropy Still Beckons: National Wealth Transfer and Potential for Philanthropy,” Technical Report, *Center on Wealth and Philanthropy*, Boston College (2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:104106>.

natural disasters to provide funding and other types of aid. Philanthropists are largely recognized as crucial agents in the betterment of society overall, providing provisions to important social causes. U2 singer Bono's work in Africa for better healthcare, for example, is widely celebrated, as is Richard Branson's 2016 pledge to use all the profits from his rail and airline to help combat global warming. It is also commented on that the current philanthropists are markedly different from their predecessors.²⁸ As described by Paul Schervish, for example, while during the first golden age, philanthropy was dominated by a handful of people (namely, Carnegie and Rockefeller), there are now many philanthropists, corresponding, broadly, to an increase in wealth in more general terms. In addition to philanthropists being more numerous, he also describes that they tend to be younger, more enthusiast about giving and social change, believe that philanthropy is important for self-fulfillment, and that it can lead to happiness of both themselves and others.²⁹

Generally speaking, two understandings with regard to the intentions of philanthropists exist: one positive and one critical. The positive camp usually understands philanthropy and philanthropic motive as an expression of altruism driven by religious duty, social obligation, or personal moral conviction. Indeed, this is arguably the most common sentiment, with people self-identifying as philanthropists with no—or little —apparent hesitation or shame. This understanding of philanthropy usually assumes that the giver receives no direct benefit of his or her own from the transaction, although there may be an indirect reward. Peter Singer, for example, maintains that people who have financial resources to spare have a moral responsibility

²⁸ Paul G. Schervish, Mary A. O' Herlihy, and John J. Havens, "Agent Accumulated Wealth and Philanthropy: The Dynamics of Accumulation and Allocation Among High-Tech Donors," *Social Welfare Research Institute*, Boston College, 2001.

²⁹ Ibid.

to give to those who have much less, based on the framework of utilitarianism that sees the reduction of suffering as an overarching moral objective. In addition, in a Kantian sense, acts of benevolence such as the redistribution of wealth in philanthropy, is more so an act of duty than kindness, arising from rational conclusions with regard the necessities of social living.

Critical responses, on the other hand, understand philanthropy, and especially philanthropy arising from capitalist agents, as more transactional than altruistic, with the giver operating under broader objectives that usually result in direct self-gain. For Michael Edwards, the act of helping others arises from aspirations of self-transformation and the rewards of positive status—feed the poor, get a name.³⁰ A similar sentiment is put forth by Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that “the gratuitous gift does not exist.”³¹ For Bourdieu, the act of helping others through giving assumes reciprocity, or at least, some form of “payback.” In the realm of capital, reciprocity does not have to be directly financial in nature, with Bourdieu arguing that economic capital can be transformed into other forms of capital, such as social, cultural, and symbolic (and back again), through philanthropic pursuits, ultimately leading to the legitimation and advantage of the gift giver.

The idea of philanthropy as an action that is transactional and empowering to the agent through direct benefit can also be traced back to Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci argued that a ruling class maintains power by securing consent of the subordinated class not only by force, but also through a process of cultural hegemony in which elites, from a position of moral authority, reproduce and cultivate ideas of “common sense” so as to maintain ideological domination.³² For

³⁰ Michael Edwards, *Small Change: Why Business Won't Save the World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010), p 26.

³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2001), p. 15.

³² Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.

Gramsci, philanthropy was a major vehicle of this process. Philanthropists, usually comprising members of an elite class, are producers of the status quo by promulgating capitalist ideology through funding and presence in social movements and organizations, and thus, preventing large scale resistance and social change. Slavok Zizek also follows this line of thinking and argues that philanthropy is not just supportive of capitalism, but fundamentally critical for its existence.³³ Philanthropy, veiled in assumptions of moral altruism and expectations of world-saving, emerges from wealth created from capitalism, which, in addition to saving the world, is also destroying it. This contradiction, however, is important because it allows capital to be circulated to things beyond materialism, such as ecological health, poverty eradication, and health care, which is, in turn, “fundamental to capitalisms continuation because it prevents a buildup of resentment which would inevitably lead to moves to undermine it, such as socialism or war.”³⁴

Social Movements

Social movements—referring broadly to collective efforts to bring about some kind of institutional, legal, or cultural change—and in particular, social movement organizations, are increasingly the recipients of philanthropy. This growth in private donations is perceived clearly in environmental organizations, the subject of this dissertation. Many environmental organizations currently receive over half of their entire budget from corporate and foundation sponsorship and funding.³⁵ Environmental problems, such as climate change, are being tackled by and spearheaded by popular philanthropists, such as Richard Branson, Leonardo Di Caprio, Elon Musk, etc. Environmental philanthropists are also active in aspects of environmental

³³ Slavok Zizek, *Violence: Six Sideways Glances* (London: Picador, 2008), pp. 25-40.

³⁴ Holmes, “Biodiversity for Billionaires,” p. 191.

³⁵ Ibid.

governance, sitting as members of boards of directors in environmental organizations and participating in policy development.³⁶

As a result of this general increase, philanthropy is back on the agenda of academic scholarship, with research generally focusing on two main question. (1) Why do elite actors provide patronage? (2) What are the effects of that patronage on the recipient social movement? To investigate this point further, a brief review of the theoretical assumptions of social movements is first necessary.

The scholarly study of social movements has long centered on the question of organizational establishment: in short, why movements form. Classic social-movement theorists understand the rise of social movements as a reaction to dissatisfaction and discontent, led by noninstitutionalized, irrational agents who collectively orient for social change. From this perspective, the degree to which people are aggrieved directly correlates to the force of the emergent movement. This traditional conception, however, began to be questioned in the sixties and seventies by proponents of a new framework: resource mobilization theory. Resource mobilization theory, first formulated by John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, maintains that traditional theories fail to account for the institutional structures and availability of resources that are central to any movement's existence and organization.³⁷ Grievances, they suggest, are secondary and continuous. The extent to which a movement is mobilized actually relates to the availability of resources at that particular time. They assert that beyond individual discontentment, “communication media and expense, levels of affluence, degree of access to

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1212-1241.

institutional centers, re-existing organization networks, and occupational structure and growth” are the determining factors for a social movement’s establishment and success.³⁸

From the perspective of resource mobilization theory, then, the social movements of the sixties and seventies developed, not because people were especially aggrieved at that time, or because social and/or environmental conditions were significantly worse, but rather because circumstances aligned so that more resources were available for social-movement activity. The climate, in other words, was amenable to the development of social-movement organizations at that time. Generally speaking, resource mobilization theorists tend to see affluence as a crucial part of social-movement mobilization. Because prosperous societies lead to the emergence of other assets, such as an intellectual classes and complex means of communication, they tend to be more conducive to mobilization.³⁹ In addition, wealthy communities can also produce “issue entrepreneurs,” that can “develop and market new social movement products,” as well as lead to “conscience constituents,” wealthy people and organizations that donate resources to the cause.⁴⁰ Other notable resources include educational facilities, communication methods, and available labor.

Resource mobilization theory was subsequently subject to critique, however. New social-movement theories that emerged from Europe maintained that it overemphasized the organizational aspects of mobilization, at the expense of normative accounts. Thinkers such as Jurgen Habermas, in contrast, emphasized the cultural and symbolic forces that are embedded in social mobilization and strategic action. For Habermas, social movements can be understood as

³⁸ Ibid., p. 1225.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Doug Mc Adam, John D. Mc Carthy and Mayer N. Zald, “Social Movements,” in B. Klandermans, H. Kriesi and S. Tarrow, ed., *Handbook of Sociology*, (Greenwich, Conn.: JAL, 1988), p. 702.

"processes through which latently available structures of rationality are transposed into social practice . . . structured by cultural traditions."⁴¹ In particular, he differentiates between the "life-world," the social arena, predominantly structured by communicative rationality, in which our day to day lives plays out, and the state and market (or system) that is structured by instrumental rationality, i.e., the strategic steering of objectives towards money or power. The expansion of instrumental rationality into the life-world is a form of colonization, according to Habermas, which monetizes and bureaucratizes human needs, leading them to be dependent on the system. Thus, social movements arise as a resistance to these forms of colonization, and seek to reclaim and recreate the three components of the life-world from forces of colonization, namely, society, personality, and culture (i.e. shared traditions, knowledge, meanings, and memories).⁴²

New social-movements theorists, therefore, such as Habermas, tend to understand social mobilization not merely as representations of institutional and organization ability, but also in terms of ideology; as "carriers of a certain critique of society that challenges social relations and cultural codes."⁴³ Social movements, in this sense, are perceived to be collective action frameworks not merely made up of rational actors seeking to gain advantage of institutional and resource rearrangement, but also embodiments of counter-cultural and alternative visions of social life. A similar perspective is shared by Ernesto Laclou and Chantal Mouffe, who maintain that social movements are "the expression of forms of resistance to the commodification, bureaucratization and increasing homogenization of social life itself."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Jurgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 122.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Hein-Anton Van Der Heijden, ed., *Handbook of Political Citizenship and Social Movements* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2014), p. 236.

⁴⁴ Ernesto Laclou and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 165.

Understanding social movement in this manner — as carriers of cultural critique and visions of new social configurations—has led some scholars to suggest that external funding and other resources provided to social-movement organizations may be attempts by dominant economic and social actors to *control* the mobilization of social movements, and thus may potentially *harm* movements, rather than help them, as implied by advocates of resource mobilization theory. Some commentators, for example, assert that the institutional resources provided to social movements, in particular the patronage directed by elite actors, may actually serve to channel social movements away from radical objectives and towards more moderate activism: in short, to alter the original goals of the movement.⁴⁵ Richard Piven and Frances Fox Cloward, for example, in their work in the *Poor People's Movements* maintain that “outside resources not only shape social movements but they also encourage institution building and bureaucratization that ultimately hinders significant organizing and change.”⁴⁶ This sentiment was joined by other scholars in the 1980s who similarly argued that resource mobilization theory failed to identify that outside support may have negative impacts on the social movements it funds.

For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the relationship between social movements and external funding, and look at the narrative of channeling as one framing of this.

Philanthropic Engagement in Social Movements: The “Channeling” Process

There is significant debate with regard the intentions and effects of social-movement

⁴⁵ Erica Kohl-Arenas, “Will the Revolution Be Funded? Resource Mobilization and the California Farm Worker Movement,” *Social Movement Studies* 13, no. 4 (2014): 482-498, p. 487.

⁴⁶ Robert Arno, *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980).

private funding. While some scholars suggest that the resources and funding provided by private sector actors are essential for movements to flourish, other scholars argue that private patronage can channel social movements away from radical action towards more incremental goals. In this section, I analyze the narrative of “channeling” with regard to the impact of philanthropy on social movements in more detail. In particular, three aspects of the channeling process are discussed: selection, professionalization, and field-building.

The first process, selection, refers to the tendency of foundations and corporate bodies to cherry-pick the organizations for funding that appear to promote the least radical agenda. One result of the selection process is that the more moderate elements of a movement gain increased traction, and thus exert more power in the movement overall, leading to a process of incrementalism that potentially affects entire movements. One example of this process was discussed by Doug McAdam and Herbert Haines in relation to the civil rights movement. They described that in response to the more radical sections of the civil rights movement that advocated for direct protest based on politically and socially transformative agendas, foundations and other private institutions shifted their financial support to organizations more concerned with incremental goals, such as education.⁴⁷

Robert Brulle and Craigs Jenkins make similar reflections in their study of funding in the environmental movement in 2005. Their research demonstrates that foundation funding in the United States is more likely to be directed at mainstream environmental organizations that promulgate capitalist-friendly frameworks, such as conservation and biodiversity protection. The more radical organizations that promote significant political and social change, such as

⁴⁷ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

environmental justice and ecofeminism organizations, receive a much smaller amount. As Brulle and Jenkins describe, while conservation receives approximately ninety percent of funding, the “radical environmental discourses that put a priority on transforming the structure of power—the environmental justice and deep ecology movement—each receive less than two percent of the total grant money.”⁴⁸ Other discourses, such as eco-feminism and eco-theology, were similarly marginalized. A potential consequences of this selection process, according to the authors, is that the trajectory of the movement can alter by the empowerment of some organizations over others. As described by Eve Pell, “by deciding which organizations get money, the grant-makers help set the agenda of the environmental movement and influence the programs that activists carry out.”⁴⁹

In addition to selection, a second account proposes that private patronage can alter organizations through a process of professionalization. The process usually occurs by foundations offering start-up money to organizations for the purpose of hiring professional staff, securing non-profit status, and establishing professional fund-raising processes.⁵⁰ Critics assert, however, that professionalization and bureaucratization has the potential to shift organizations from their original missions. Suzanne Pharr, for instance, demonstrates this point with her experience of working in feminist movements in the nineties. Referencing the “Battered Women’s Movement,” she describes that, in many cases, the pressure from funders to hire professional, degree-bearing, individuals gradually led to the work of community members being

⁴⁸ Robert J. Brulle and J. Craig Jenkins, “Foundations and the Environmental Movement: Priorities, Strategies and Impact” in D. Faber and D. Mc Carthy, ed., *Foundations for Social Change: Critical Perspectives on Philanthropy and Popular Movements* (Lanham, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

⁴⁹ Eve Pell, “Buying In,” *Mother Jones Magazine* 25 (1990): p. 255.

⁵⁰ Jack L. Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

replaced. This was particularly significant for the organization because the community members replaced tended to have more personal relations to the struggles within the area than the professionals that were trained outside of the community.⁵¹ In addition, she notes that the pressure from funders to emulate a corporate structure, notably, a hierarchal model, disrupted underlying normative narrative ideals of the movement, such as egalitarianism, decentralization, and cooperation. Similarly, Pharr remarks that the focus and time spent on fundraising in professional organization both serves to detract from direct activism, as well as create a climate of competition with other groups, rather than cooperation.

Similar conclusions were drawn with regard to the professionalization of organizations in the Native American movement. Madonna Thunderhawk, an activist in the seventies and eighties, recounts organizing around the issue of diabetes in Native American communities. She writes that because Indian communities were given unhealthy food from the government when they had been relocated and displaced from their original lifestyles, Native American activists addressed the epidemic of diabetes within communities through direct protest to government and community organizing. When the groups were professionalized by entering into the non-profit sector and accepted federal grants to work on diabetes prevention, however, the organization was transformed into the creator of events and pamphlets. She writes:

Activism is relegated to events. Many people will get involved for an event but avoid rocking the boat on an ongoing basis because if they do, they might lose their funding. For instance, if the government is funding the pamphlet, then an organization is not going to address the impact of US colonialization of Native diets because they don't want to lose funding.⁵²

⁵¹ Suzanne Pharr, plenary address, "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded," conference at the University of California, Santa Barbara, 30 April, 2004.

⁵² Madonna Thunderhawk, "Native Organizing before the Non-profit Industrial Complex," in INCITE Women of Color Against Violence, ed., *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non Profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2007), p. 105,

Studies of these mechanisms—selection and professionalization—comprise the majority of the literature with regard to social movement channeling through foundations. As Tim Bartley states, however, although both of these mechanisms “undergird analyses of channeling . . . they do not exhaust the ways in which foundations can shape social movements.”⁵³ In response, he articulates a third mechanism, “field-building,” arguing that what is also at play is the deliberate transformation of the “organizational field” of movements by foundations and other private actors. An organizational field, in this case, refers to groups of organizations that share knowledge and institutional norms, described by Bartley as a “socially constructed arena of self-referencing, mutually dependent organizations.”⁵⁴ Organizational fields, however, are not just the relationships between organizations, but also operate at a “meso-level,” mediating between organizations, institutions, regulatory bodies, consumers, and suppliers.⁵⁵ They exhibit “distinctive ‘rules of the game,’ relational networks, and resource distributions that differentiate multiple levels of actors and models for action.”⁵⁶ Bartley’s field-building approach, thus, draws on main two insights: (1) that social movements are “embedded in multi-organizational fields,” which can in turn, influence its missions, strategies and organizational structure, and (2) that private philanthropic agents are often “key structures in the formation and structuration of organizational field.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Bartley, “How Foundations Shape Social Movements,” p. 230.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 231.

⁵⁵ Paul Di Maggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983): 147-160.

⁵⁶ Hayagreeva Rao, Calvin Morrill, and Mayer N. Zald, “Power Plays: How Social Movements and Collective Action Create New Organizational Forms,” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 22 (2000): 237-281.

⁵⁷ Bartley, “How Foundations Shape Social Movements,” p. 232.

In discussing the impacts of philanthropy on organizational field-building, Bartley examines the field of forestry certification. In the late eighties and early nineties in Europe and North America, environmental organizations and members of the forestry industry established certification programs to differentiate sustainable from unsustainable practices in industrial logging. In 1991, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was created, an international institution that sets standards for sustainable and responsible forestry, and allows the use of their label for the packaging of products emerging from sources that successfully meet these standards. The FSC also led to the creation of similar agencies, such as the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), and other European institutions. Although Bartley points out that these organization were initially created in an attempt to compete with the FSC, he claims that the “ensuing mix of competition and adaptation helped turn forest certification in a dynamic, contentious and rapidly growing field.”⁵⁸ This is reflected further in the malleability of each institution in relation to another. He asserts that the competing programs “mutually adjusted their practices over time, with the industry sponsored SFI becoming “more FSC like,” and the FSC sometimes altering its rules to attract business support.⁵⁹ Furthermore, as the field expanded, education programs grew and disseminated the standards and criteria inherent to the field to both a scholarly and industrial audience.

In the case of forestry certification, Bartley points to substantial foundation and corporate involvement in both the early and later stages of the field. In the earlier stages, small private donations were made, largely from previously existing corporate officials with ties to the forestry industry. Some foundations in particular, such as “The Homeland Institute,” were instrumental in

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 235.

establishing some of the early meetings by providing vital financial support. From 1993 onwards, philanthropic presence greatly increased, partly due to the increasing incorporation of larger philanthropic institutes. As one member of the FSC noted:

The FSC was founded in '93 and I think at that point it was clear that the FSC needed a lot of funding to get itself off the ground. So that was '93/'94 and you know, by that time, I think the funders like Ford and McArthur and Rockefeller were starting to become much more heavily involved.⁶⁰

As described by Bartley, these larger funders worked together from 1993 onwards, participating in collective action to support the forestry certificate. In 1993, for example, the Rockefeller, McArthur and Ford Foundations united many other philanthropic organizations together in order to provide more robust support. Over time, more sponsorship organizations became involved, including the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and others.⁶¹ As a result, private funding for the forestry certificate increased greatly though those years, increasing from \$196,000 in 1994 to 6.1 million in 1996, and further tripling in 2000, with the U.S. portion of the FSC receiving almost eighty percent of its total funding from the private sector.

The growth of funding and the presence of private actors, therefore, coincided with the growth of the field in general. Through strategic funding, foundations helped to establish and support forest certification in a way “that built a field of mutually supporting institutions,” which led to the foundation being able to “redefine the political space and channel activism in subtle but consequential ways.”⁶² Bartley has noted that the attraction of foundations to forestry certification in the first place can be understood through a resonation of certain norms and ideals.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 240.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

He states, for example, that the certification model resonated with “neoliberal policy scripts emphasizing the promise of markets to solve a wide array of problems.”⁶³ Because forest certification put forth a form of governance that was private and industry-regulated, and because it represented an alternative to the timber consumer boycotts of the late 1980s, certification represented a more market-friendly approach. As described by Bartley, it resonated with the goals of the larger foundations more so than those alternatives that highlighted the need more stringent federal regulation of industry and an overall reduction of logging practices.

Conclusion

Thus, these three approaches—selection, professionalization, and field-building—represent the dominant ways in which channeling is explained and understood in social-movement scholarship. Despite the importance and viability of these analyses for understanding the complex relations between private philanthropic activity and social movements, however, the topic of how private sector patronage and engagement affects *normative* aspect of social movements remains under-explored. Indeed, the three approaches tend to focus largely on institutional and organizational changes, and although normative change is implied in that, it is often not explicitly laid out. Research on the processes of selection and professionalization, for example, predominantly outline the effects of philanthropy on organizational realignment, discussing, for example, how patronage displaces time and resources potentially spent on direct activism by leading to financial dependencies which necessitate more focus on fundraising, leads to changes in employees and organizational hierarchy, etc. In addition, although the process of field-building as articulated by Bartley engages with normative change in a more straightforward

⁶³ Ibid.

way, the main focus is largely on how field-building affects the practices of organizations, rather than underlying norms and values.

Some research does exist, however, that makes more explicit the connections between private patronage and ideological change. In a now famous publication, Robert Arnove, for example, analyzes the three biggest foundations of the twentieth century, the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundation, and details their influence on “worldviews” through funding directed towards education. He writes:

Through funding and promoting research in critical areas, the big three have been able to exercise decisive influence over the growing edge of knowledge, the problems that are examined and by whom, and the uses to which newly generated information is put. Through the education programs they fund, foundations are able to influence the world views of the general public as well as the orientations and commitment.⁶⁴

As he notes, the support of these foundations for social causes was not undertaken neutrally, but rather operated under specific norms and with particular objectives. In particular, Arnove points out that early educational philanthropy supported public institutions in a manner that was consistent with the normative framework and material interests of the capitalist class, rather than that of the workers.

Similarly, a recent publication by Justin Farrell demonstrates that normative positions on climate change (whether it is “believed in” or not) are influenced by a network of political and financial actors that are involved in funding climate change organizations at various levels. Using a computational analysis of climate-change politics in the United States, and analyzing 164 organizations, he concludes with two main findings. First, he asserts that “organizations with corporate funding were more likely to have written and disseminated texts meant to polarize the climate-change issues,” and second, “that

⁶⁴Arnove, *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism*, p. 17.

corporate funders influence the actual thematic content of these polarization efforts, and the discursive prevalence of that thematic content over time.”⁶⁵ These findings, although in one sense, confirming suspicions that many people already had, also disrupt the notion that ideological positions and economics exist in an vacuum, uninfluenced by the money that supports them. In the conclusion of his paper, Farrell recommends that more work be undertaken on the increased role of private funding and particular ideological shifts in the United States and elsewhere.

In the remainder of this dissertation, then, I investigate in more detail the process of channeling as it relates to private patronage and engagement in the environmental movement, paying close attention to how these forms of engagement affect the ideological aspects of the movement. In the next chapter, I address some of the underlying norms under which private sector engagement takes place in social movements in the first instance, focusing, in particular, on corporate social responsibility and philanthropy. I maintain that central to private engagement and patronage in social movements and causes are assumptions about ideal business-society relations, and notions about the responsibility of private sector actors to alleviating social and ecological problems.

⁶⁵ Justin Farrell, “Corporate Funding and Ideological Polarization about Climate Change,” *PNAS* 113, no. 1 (2016): 92–97, p. 92.

CHAPTER 3

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, PHILANTHROPY AND THE STEWARDSHIP ETHIC

In March 2015, Starbucks ran a national campaign, Race Together, in an attempt to address racial tensions in the US. In reaction to the killings by policemen of two unarmed black men, Michael Brown and Eric Garner, Starbucks CEO, Howard Schultz, encouraged his employees to write “race together” on the outsides of coffee cups so as to initiate dialogue with their customers about race relations in the U.S. The campaign was a failure. Critics immediately began to ridicule it as superficial and badly organized, and shortly after, it was discontinued. Despite its lack of success, however, the campaign sparked a debate about the role of the corporation and corporate leaders in contemporary society, addressing the question of what extent corporations are, or should be, responsible for alleviating negative social issues. Schultz, in facing the backlash, was not deterred with his goals, stating that he intends to continue the cause [of alleviating racial tensions in the U.S. with the “same vigor he pursues corporate profits.”⁶⁶ This approach is similar to that of other CEOs. Rose Marcario, for example, CEO of Patagonia, stated in reaction to the campaign: “we’re at a tipping point where businesses need to step up and take a lead with moral and ethical voices.”⁶⁷

Campaigns like those, and corporate involvement in matters of the public good in general, are one of the most notable developments of recent times in the global political economy. Through the framework of corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporations and

⁶⁶ Khashbu Shan, “Why Starbucks Race Together Campaign Failed,” *Eater*, 18 January 2015, <https://www.eater.com/2015/6/18/8807849/why-starbucks-race-together-campaign-failed>.

⁶⁷ Austin Carr. “The Inside Story of Starbucks Race Together Campaign,” *FastCompany*, 15 June 2015 <https://www.fastcompany.com/3046890/the-inside-story-of-starbucks-race-together-campaign-no-foam>.

other private institutions are engaging with the public through a series of initiatives designed to “give back” to the communities and environments in which they reside. Such initiatives involve adopting standards of best practice, ensuring environmental protection, sponsoring community non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and funding campaigns to address social issues.

Opinions as to why corporations are acting ethically in this way vary. Perhaps the most repeated explanation is that CSR initiatives are a direct response to external social pressure from agents such as activists and NGOs. Because multinational corporations are considered to share too small of a burden in the just distribution of social goods, and because the contemporary economic system creates problems including wage inequality, social injustices, and ecological destruction, activists and other counter-hegemonic actors are pressuring the private sector to adopt socially responsible behaviors. Boaventura Santos articulates this process by pointing out that the very forces of neoliberal globalization “while propagating throughout the globe the same system of domination and exclusion, has created the conditions for the counter-hegemonic forces to engage in various emancipatory social projects.”⁶⁸ From this understanding, therefore, CSR is recognized as a form of social regulation on the market where public actors apply heat in order to “force” corporations to engage in ethical actions.

Other scholars, however, argue that this understanding of CSR fails to take into account the ways in which the private sector itself shapes the development and context of CSR.

According to Ronan Shamir, “capitalist and capitalist entities do not sit still when faced with threats.”⁶⁹ Private sector actors are adept at managing resistance in order to maintain legitimacy,

⁶⁸ Boaventura Santos, *Towards a New Legal Common Sense: Law, Globalization and Emancipation* (London: Butterworths, 2002), p. 446.

⁶⁹ Ronen Shamir, “The De-Radicalization of Corporate Social Responsibility,” *Critical Sociology* 30, no. 3 (2004): 669-689 p. 670.

reflected by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, who posit: “capitalism has always relied on critiques of the status quo to alert it to any untrammelled development of its current forms and to discover the antidotes required to neutralize opposition and increase the level of profitability with in.”⁷⁰ From this perspective, CSR is not simply a passive process in which the private sector is shaped and regulated by outside social critique, but is also an active mechanism in which corporations shape and re-shape the normative landscape of CSR internally. Indeed, one of the major debates within the CSR community is the very meaning of responsibility itself. Whereas on one side, counter-hegemonic actors equate it with definite and enforceable moral duties designed to restrain corporate activity, on the other, the private sector associates responsibility with voluntariness and self-regulation. Due to the latter understanding being dominant within discourses of CSR, corporate actors, rather than accept responsibility in the form legal obligations and regulations, usually insist on self-regulatory schemes.⁷¹

Critics argue that this focus on self-regulation in mainstream CSR discourses not only enables greenwashing, but can also serve to increase the epistemological legitimacy of neoliberalism and consolidate the power of large individual corporations.⁷² Shamir, for example, maintains that CSR, imbued from above with a “voluntary and altruistic spirit,” allows the corporate actor to dictate the terms of its own critique, while simultaneously fending off external regulatory threats and creating a benevolent public image.⁷³ This is further exacerbated by popularized notions of corporate moral agency. Lozano points out that the assumption of an

⁷⁰ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapelli, “The New Spirit of Capitalism,” Paper presented to the conference of Europeanists, 14-16 March, 2002, Chicago.

⁷¹ Shamir, “The De-Radicalization of Corporate Social Responsibility.”

⁷² See Shamir, “The Age of Responsibilization: on Market-Embedded Morality;” Banarjee, “Corporate Social Responsibility: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly.”

⁷³ Shamir, “The De-Radicalization of Corporate Social Responsibility.”

alleged corporate moral agency that is both “individual and self-sufficient” gives the corporation the normative tools to fend off external regulation, premised on the idea that private action is inherently moral action, and that for a corporation to act morally, it must act voluntarily without interference.⁷⁴ This has led, at times, to peculiar circumstances where corporations are at once exemplars of ethical practice from the perspective of the CSR community and the public, while simultaneously engaging in immoral and illegal actions to make a profit, as in the case of Volkswagen scandal of 2015.⁷⁵

Thus, while the connections between CSR and corporate empowerment are beginning to be explored in scholarly literature, the means by which the corporate sector shapes and re-shapes the normative structure of CSR remains lacking. In this article, I argue that the capacity of the private sector to shape the normative framework of CSR is emboldened by the perpetuation of narratives that associate private sector activities as inherently moral, specifically, ones that bestow moral agency to private institutions. In particular, I focus on one such narrative prevalent in early twentieth century philanthropy, namely, the stewardship ethic. I argue that the stewardship ethic, the idea that the business leader ought to act as a financial and moral steward for broader society, was a foundation for emerging philanthropy and served to empower corporations during a time of increased public scrutiny at private actions, acting as a buffer for more penetrating critiques of industrial capitalist activity. Finally, I maintain that although current CSR frameworks differ in practice and form from the philanthropy of the turn of the century, the narrative and normative function of stewardship remains as a major force behind CSR and is one of the drivers behind contemporary efforts to maintain CSR as a self-

⁷⁴ Josep M. Lozano, *Ethics and Organizations* (Amsterdam: Springer, 2000).

⁷⁵ Carl Rhodes, “Democratic Business Ethics: Volkswagen’s Emissions Scandals and the Disruption of Corporate Sovereignty,” *Organization Studies* 37, no. 10 (2016): 1501-1518.

regulatory and voluntary practice. The final section undertakes a brief exploration into the interactions between corporate stewardship and corporate sovereignty.

This chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, I outline a general understanding of CSR. Specifically, I locate the discourse of CSR as a result of two merging forces, which Peter Utting and Kate Ives describe as the “movement from below and the movement from above.”⁷⁶ I argue that the movement from below represents a form of counter-hegemonic resistance to corporate power, whereas the movement from above signals attempts from the private sector to neutralize and offset these critiques. The second section provides a historical account of early twentieth-century philanthropy. I understand the normative foundations of philanthropy to be rooted in notions of stewardship, whereby the corporation is understood as a steward for the wellbeing of broader society. I argue that this narrative of stewardship, propagated in large part by private sector actors, was vital in the various stages of corporate empowerment during that time. In the final section, I analyze the “ethic of stewardship” from the perspective of the contemporary discourse of CSR and argues that while, different in form, CSR largely relies on assumptions of private stewardship for its validation, and in particular, the legitimization of self-regulatory CSR frameworks.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The practice of CSR has grown substantially in recent times. According to *The Economist*, CSR is now “an industry in itself, with full time staff, newsletters, professional associations, and massed armies of consultants.”⁷⁷ The notion that corporations ought to have

⁷⁶ Peter Utting and Kate Ives, “The Politics of Corporate Responsibility and the Oil Industry,” *Stair* 2, no. 1 (2006): 11-34.

⁷⁷ The Economist, “Two Faced Capitalism,” 24 January 2004, <http://www.economist.com/node/2369912>.

social responsibilities to the public has been welcomed not only amongst academics and NGOs, but has also blossomed in the private sector as well. As described by David S. Spence, “[O]ne would be hard-pressed to find a Fortune 500 company that does not publish some form of annual CSR report touting its investments in environmental sustainability, social progress, and the like.”⁷⁸

Broadly speaking, CSR refers to the custom of extending consideration beyond the direct owners of the stock to include a further array of stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, customers, local communities, etc. This custom is interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, CSR is understood as a means of enforcing accountability for a firm's actions. As described by Myrna Wulfson, it means that a “corporation should be held accountable for any of its actions that affect people, their communities, and their environment.”⁷⁹ This first point, therefore, is a simple statement of answerability, whereby the corporation is expected to take responsibility for the costs of their own profit-seeking behaviors, including the cleaning up of industrial pollution, compensatory packages for communities they have affected, etc. A second common point, however, goes beyond accountability to a deeper meaning of responsibility. Keith Davis and Robert Blomstrom, for example, define CSR as the obligation of the corporate executives to “take action which protects and improves the welfare of society as a whole along with its own interests.”⁸⁰ Based on this understanding, corporations should not only accept responsibility for the negative externalities of their own actions, but also actively pursue “social good” beyond the

⁷⁸ David Spence, “Corporate Social Responsibility in the Oil and Gas Industry: The Importance of Reputational Risk,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 86, no. 1 (2011): 59-85, p. 61.

⁷⁹ Myrna Wulfson, “The Ethics of Corporate Social Responsibility and Philanthropic Ventures,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 29 (2001): 135-145, p. 136.

⁸⁰ Keith P. Davis and Robert L. Blomstrom, *Business and Society: Environment and Responsibility*, 3 ed. (New York, Mc Graw Hill, 1975), p. 39.

range of their own company. The idea of the Triple Bottom Line is a reflection of this. It works on the assumption that the company is a member of a moral community, and consequently understands the objectives of corporations as three-fold: (1) to make a profit, (2) to better society in some capacity, and (3) to improve environmental conditions overall.

This latter understanding of the corporation-in-society relationship, sometimes referred to as the stakeholder model, is perceived to be a drastic delineation from other forms, namely, the shareholder account. According to the shareholder model, the only obligation of business is to make money for the shareholders, the owners of the stock. Social responsibilities beyond profit-making are understood to be counter-intuitive to the essential role of business. Reflected most famously in Milton Friedman's *New York Times* piece, in 1970 entitled "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits," the shareholder model, as presented in Friedman's argument, states that the discourse of CSR is characterized by an "analytical looseness and lack of rigor."⁸¹ To say that a business has responsibilities beyond business, according to Friedman, is, at best, no more than shallow prose, but at worse, a deeply undemocratic form of governance where un-elected CEOs of firms can perform governmental functions by acting as "legislator, executive, and jurist" for broader society.⁸² As a result, a shareholder view of the firm is largely skeptical of all attempts by corporations to 'improve society' beyond direct financial gains. As described by Bobby Banarjee, "[the] Friedman camp is dismissive, in fact, downright suspicious about corporate social responsibility outside the shareholder value framework."⁸³

⁸¹ Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits," *New York Times*, 13 September 1970.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Subhatrata Bobby Banarjee, "Corporate Social Responsibility: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," *Critical Sociology* 43, no 1 (2008): 51-79, p. 60.

Despite resistance to the stakeholder account, however, it is now regarded as the dominant framework of business-society relations. Corporations are not only seen as moral agents capable of delivering social “goods” outside of the profit framework, but also as moral authorities in their own right. The Starbucks case above may be an example when a corporation “gets it wrong” by appearing inauthentic, or not displaying the correct sensitivity to an issue, but the assumption that Starbucks *should* be trying to better society remains intact for the most part.

The View from Below

As described by Peter Utting and Kate Ives, the popularity that CSR now enjoys can be traced back to the eighties and nineties emerging as a result of two forces, described as the “movement from below [and the] movement from above.”⁸⁴ The movement from below consisted mostly of non-governmental organizations and activists, described as civil society more broadly, and were mobilized by the rise of novel forms of communication, organization and transnational advocacy networks, and spurred on by increasing reports of corporate malpractice in the media. In 1989, for example, Exxon Valdez, an oil tanker owned by Exxon Shipping Company, spilled approximately eleven million gallons of crude oil after striking Prince William Sound in the Gulf of Alaska. At that time, it was the largest oil spill to ever occur, eventually covering 2,100 km of coastline, in an area populated with rich marine life, including sea otters, seals and seabirds, etc. Further, reports of overseas malpractice with regard to other large multi-national corporations were beginning to emerge. Shell, for example, was criticized for its involvement in various human and labor rights abuses in its practices of oil extraction in Nigeria, culminating in the mid-nineties with allegations that they were allying with

⁸⁴ Utting and Ives, “The Politics of Corporate Responsibility and the Oil Industry.”

the Nigerian government to quell an environmental protest led by the Ogoni people, leading ultimately to the execution of Ken Sero-Wiwa and eight other activists. Other allegations of malpractice were directed at Coca Cola for its purported involvement in the actions of paramilitary units that murdered union organizers at a bottling plant in Colombia that catered to its products.

Corporate scandals such as these, and other instances of overseas human rights violations involving large multinationals were widely reported and instigated an organized resistance to what was perceived as illegitimate uses of corporate power. This resistance took the form of both legal and non-legal action. From a legal perspective, counter-hegemonic actors attempted to establish mandatory environmental and social reporting onto multinationals via proposals to the European Commission and other international governance bodies to establish legal blueprints that would subject multinational corporations to “a set of socially responsible universal standards that will apply to corporations above and beyond the demands of any specific locality.”⁸⁵ Although these attempts would ultimately prove unsuccessful, they were largely supported by NGOs and other civil society actors, with *The Global Policy Forum*, stating that “multinational corporations are too important for their conduct to be left to voluntary and self-generated standards.”⁸⁶ Other activists enlisted the legal systems of Western countries in an effort to sanction corporate behavior overseas. Unocal, for example, was sued by plaintiffs for involvement in human rights violations in their activities of oil extraction in Burma by invoking the Alien Tort Claims Act of the US.

⁸⁵ Shamir, “The De-Radicalization of Corporate Social Responsibility,” p. 676.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

In addition to attempted legal reform, alternative forms of resistance focused on publicly shaming multinationals to coerce them into *voluntarily* adopting responsible business practices. Actions such as the corporate boycott against Coca Cola in the eighties is one such example, where activists predominantly located in the U.S. boycotted Coca Cola products for the company's involvement in the apartheid government of South Africa. Coca Cola responded by donating ten million dollars to social housing for black South Africans and also promising to sell their operations in South Africa. Further, many new non-profit groups emerged which focused on monitoring corporate behavior and fostering increased transparency in the private sector. Organizations such as Corporate Watch, for example, established in 1996, provided a critical and independent new source, specifically focused on the social and environmental impacts of large international corporations. According to Robert Sklair, the amount of corporate surveillance increased to such an extent that he describes that the "[t]he contemporary level of monitoring of corporate activities is historically unprecedented." Now, he argues, "there are thousands of organizations actively seeking out corporate malpractices all over the world."⁸⁷

Thus, the movement from below, led largely by members of civil society, and brought about by the widespread reporting of corporate malpractice, as well as the rising status of corporations as global private authorities more generally, has served to mold the early CSR movement and bring it to public attention. Activists, unhappy with growing levels of corporate power, and the abuses of that power, have used both legal and non-legal measures to coerce corporation into ethical actions. As described by Shamir, the "enhanced powers of MNCs [gave] rise to new types of political initiatives that focus[ed] on the inadequate accountability of MNCs

⁸⁷ Robert Sklair, *The Sociology of the Global System* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 67.

to the vast populations effected by their business practices.”⁸⁸ CSR frameworks, such as accountability and ethics annual reporting, sustainability initiatives, and corrections of labor rights abuses, were thus developed as a result of these new forms of political initiatives in reaction to corporate malpractice.

The View from Above

CSR, from this perspective, therefore, can be understood as a framework arising from counter-hegemonic pressures and one which is forced upon the private sector by civil society actors. Other scholars, however, argue that this interpretation of CSR fails to take into account the ways in which the private sector itself shapes the development and context of CSR. Indeed, as described by Utting and Ives, the CSR agenda in the eighties and nineties was not just passively accepted from the private sector, but was largely spearheaded by corporations in a manner that was more *active* than reactive. Indeed, they state that it was the oil industry, one of the worst offenders with regard malpractice, which pioneered the new CSR agendas. Shell, for example, produced the first report that took social and environmental responsibility into consideration in their publication of “People and the Environment: Annual Report 1996,” and currently the oil industry remains one of the leaders in social and environmental reporting. From the early 1980s onwards, they describe that multinationals from the oil sector began “vigorous advertising, adopting codes of conduct, strengthening environmental management systems, investing in renewables, increasing their support for local community projects, producing

⁸⁸ Shamir, “The De-Radicalization of Corporate Social Responsibility,” p. 676.

sustainability reports, and joining or collaborating with various national and international CSR initiatives and institutions.”⁸⁹

Perhaps understandably, the actions of the corporations immediately became subject to scrutiny on charges of “greenwashing.”⁹⁰ It was argued that rather than genuinely take into consideration the critiques from civil society and alter business practices, these companies were merely making either shallow adjustments to maintain business-as-usual, or actively deceiving and exaggerating environmental and social credentials. CorpWatch bestowed “greenwash awards” on the worst offenders, many of which were part of the oil industry. It was found that British Petroleum, for example, despite changing their name to “Beyond Petroleum” and promoting their involvement in solar energy projects, were simultaneously spending billions on oil exploration in Alaska in 2000. Similar circumstances were reported elsewhere, detailing either corporate deception or gross exaggeration with regard responsible actions in an attempt to maintain a positive public image and distract in the backdrop of corporate scandals.

Although these efforts on the part of the private sector, and in particular the oil companies, was described as *greenwash*, Utting and Ives argue that this label has the capacity to misdirect the issue, stating that the “notion of greenwash tends to suggest that the business is simply acting defensively and that it has no genuine interest in CSR apart from reputation management.”⁹¹ According to the authors, the actions are more accurately located within a wider Gramscian understanding of hegemonic resistance insofar as attempts by the private sector to adopt socially responsible behavior are efforts to neutralize critique and maintain authority. For them, the “movement from above” not only represented a strategic attempt to manage public

⁸⁹ Utting and Ives, “The Politics of Corporate Responsibility and the Oil Industry,” p. 15.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

disapproval, but also to create a CSR framework that would allow large corporations to maintain the epistemological legitimacy of capitalist enterprise at a global scale, writing that the companies promoting CSR were not just reacting to pressures from below, but rather “actively trying to shape and lead the CSR agenda.”⁹² This was witnessed specifically in the early stages of the movement, with business interests coalescing to influence the outcomes of major conferences, such as the UNCED, the United Nations Conference of Environment and Development, in 1992, for example. As described by Brockington and Duffy, “business used its prior experience with UN activities to prepare the ground for a central role in the UNCED process.”⁹³ In response to a perceived threat that these new forms of environmental and social governance may have on the framework of neoliberalism, business interests came together to shape a more favorable outcome by ensuring corporate presence in the leadership of the conference, as well as forming coalitions to block legislation that would potentially affect corporate sovereignty. Maurice Strong, for example, a Canadian multi-millionaire with interests in the oil and gas industries, was appointed as Secretary General of the conference, and made specific reference to the compatibility of free trade and sustainability in his opening speech. Further, in reaction to the proposed UN Code of Conduct for multinational corporations devised by the UN Economic and Social Council that would see corporations subject to legally binding norms and codes of conduct, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee and the International Chamber of Commerce devised an alternative that focuses on corporate sovereignty and self-regulation rather than legal regulation. The influx of business influence was also apparent in the World Summit on Sustainability Development (WSSN) ten years later, where,

⁹² Ibid., p. 16.

⁹³ Dan Brockington and Rosaleen Duffy, *Capitalism and Conservation* (New Jersey, Wiley-Blackwell 2010), p. 34.

as described by Utting and Ives, “active business mobilization . . . managed to put the idea of public-private partnerships firmly on the international agenda, and, in the process, divert attention from calls for “corporate accountability” and stronger regulation of transnational corporations.”⁹⁴

According to Utting and Ives, then, the movement from above highlights the influence that business interests have on the framework of sustainability and CSR in general. This influence is reflected most poignantly on the continued focus on self-regulation in CSR. Despite attempts in the early part of the movement to establish CSR as a legally enforceable framework, it has remained stubbornly voluntary and self-regulatory, largely brought about by maintained pressure from large governance bodies and the private sector. The European Commission, for example, has consistently rejected any proposals to enforce legally binding norms of corporations, emphasizing instead the voluntary nature of CSR, stating “it did not intend to impose responsible behavior on companies by means of compulsory regulation.”⁹⁵ Likewise, in response to attempts to use the Alien Torts Claim Act (ATCA) as a way to legally condemn corporate overseas behavior, large group of corporations formed organizations, such as USA Engage, which invested financial resources to actively delegitimize the ACTA and repeal the laws surrounding it. Those who attempted to hold corporate overseas behavior accountable to American laws were often referred to as “foreign nationals” and “unaccountable actors” by USA Engage and accused of “risk[ing] American interests” and posing threats to national security.⁹⁶

As Shamir asserts, what these efforts demonstrate is not simply an attempt to change the practical workings of CSR, but also to alter its normative foundations, stating that the “major

⁹⁴ Utting and Ives, “The Politics of Corporate Responsibility and the Oil Industry,” p. 16.

⁹⁵ Shamir, “The De-Radicalization of Corporate Social Responsibility.”

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 674.

currency that is negotiated in the field [of CSR] is the very meaning and scope of social responsibility itself.”⁹⁷ While on one side, civil society actors usually associate responsibility with strict and enforceable norms of behavior and subsequently “invest the idea of CSR with binding . . . rules, envisioning it as a set of regulated structures of corporate governance,”⁹⁸ on the other side are those private sector agents who posit an alternative notion of responsibility that is more closely associated with a “voluntary and altruistic spirit.”⁹⁹ For the latter, CSR is best achieved by being non-enforceable, self-regulated and voluntary. Subsequently, they work so as to create a normative framework for CSR that imbues the private actor with a self-determined moral agency that can act ethically, and preferably, without interference. As Shamir describes, “the principle of self-regulation has become the corporations most crucial frontline in the struggle over meaning and an essential ideological locus for disseminating the neoliberal logic of altruistic social participation that is to be governed by good will alone.”¹⁰⁰

This kind of explicit CSR, focusing on self-regulation and moral voluntarism, is now the dominant form of corporate social responsibility in the private sector.¹⁰¹ The notion that corporate responsibility is inherently altruistic, governing by good will alone, is now largely a truism in mainstream CSR discourse. A critical analysis will follow on from the position of Richard Marenz who states that “understanding why explicit managerial-centered corporate social responsibility which first developed in the United States, has recently spread globally

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 671.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 677.

¹⁰¹ See: Dirk Matten and Jeremy Moon: ““Implicit” and “Explicit” CSR: A Conceptual Framework for a Comparative Understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility,” *Academy of Management Review* 33, no. 2 (2008): 404-424.

requires an examination of the circumstances under which it first emerged.”¹⁰² To this end, in the next section, I turn to early twentieth-century philanthropy, what has been described as the theoretical roots of contemporary CSR. In particular, I explore the “stewardship ethic,” a dominant narrative in the early twentieth-century philanthropy movement that served to frame business-society relations, as well as provide a normative framework for emerging manifestations of corporate social responsibility via philanthropy. I suggest, ultimately, that the tenets of the stewardship ethic remain a substantial moral force in both framing mainstream discourses CSR today and validating current trends towards self-regulation.

Philanthropy and the Stewardship Ethic

The rise of philanthropy in the U.S. at the beginning of the twentieth century was embedded in the unique socio-economic characteristics of the time. Industrialism was leading to large economic growth, causing an increase in the number of wealthy people. In the 1870s, there was just 100 millionaires in the U.S., but during the next twenty years, this number increased significantly. In 1892, the New York Times reported that the figure was at 4,047 and in 1916, the number had reached 40,000 millionaires, and some of them billionaires.¹⁰³ In addition to the upsurge in the wealthy class, there was also a rise in social ills associated with increasing industrialism, including growing class disparities, urban poverty, and health problems. Many industrialists at the time, aware of burgeoning criticism with regard to the growing corporate class, established foundations by which to provide charitable contributions to social causes and “give back” to their community. Most notably among them were businessmen such as John D.

¹⁰² Richard Marens, “What Comes Around: The Early 20th Century American Roots of Legitimizing Corporate Social Responsibility,” *Organization* 20, no. 3 (2013): 454-476, p. 454.

¹⁰³ Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 8.

Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie and Cornelius Vanderbilt, all of whom were included in the “mega-rich” at the time, and whose philanthropic contributions were recognized as providing well needed relief to certain sectors of the public.

Philanthropy was not, of course, a novel activity, but the conceptual foundations of the newly emerging philanthropy differed slightly from its predecessors. While previous philanthropic tendencies largely participated in a tradition of relief-giving, the new philanthropy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century moved in a different direction, in part inspired by a perceived redundancy of the older form. For many of the new philanthropists, “almsgiving” was replaced by initiatives to “maximize human potential.”¹⁰⁴ Philanthropy was not so much charity, in this new configuration, but rather a direct means to societal improvement. Carnegie, in particular, rejected the older philanthropic tradition of charity and instead sought to encourage individual and cultural advancement, stating in the Gospel of Wealth, “in bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves.”¹⁰⁵ As a result, the main recipients of his donations were largely those institutions designed to improve civilization, such as educational and cultural organizations. Frederick Gates, who John D. Rockefeller hired to be his head associate of philanthropy, also reflected Rockefeller’s desire that his financial contributions would serve as an aid to progress in general, and in 1902, reports that he read “intensively about the origins and development of human civilization to find out the best means to use the foundation to promote human progress.”¹⁰⁶ In 1908, the conclusions were published in an article by Rockefeller, specifically outlining the six areas upon which progress depended, “(1)

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Lynn and Susan Wisely, “Four Traditions of Philanthropy” in A. Davis and E. Lynn, eds., *The Civically Engaged Reader* (Chicago: Great Books Foundation, 2006).

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Carnegie, “The Gospel of Wealth,” *The North American Review* 148, no. 391 (1889): 663-666.

¹⁰⁶ Arnove, *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism*, p. 28.

the means of subsistence; (2) government and law; (3) literature and language; (4) science and philosophy; (5) art and refinement; (6) morality and religion.”¹⁰⁷

Robert H. Bremmer comments on this phenomenon in his analysis that modern day philanthropy reflected a “curious but very important shift in emphasis in succoring the unfortunate to assisting the ambitious.”¹⁰⁸ To aid, the poor, the cold, and the wretched would serve as charity, but it would not be productive economically and it may also encourage slothfulness and idleness, according to many of the industrialists. As a result, the new capitalists devoted funds to projects and individuals that would, according to Andrew Carnegie, “build ladders upon which the aspiring can rise.”¹⁰⁹

Explanations as to why the new found enthusiasm for philanthropy arose during this time are plentiful. Adams writes that the wealthy new industrialist American philanthropy was largely inspired by the situation in Europe at that time. Many of the European industrialists, seeking entry to the political elite, began to distribute some of their wealth in an attempt to integrate themselves into a society which was at the time still largely led by the aristocracy.¹¹⁰ According to Margaret E. Menninger, devoting parts of their capital to charitable causes allowed them to gain “social wealth,” giving them a foot in the door of the political elite by gaining crucial social influence.¹¹¹ In turn, many of the American industrialists traveled to Europe in an effort to become better versed in the European cultural and artistic canon which allowed them entry and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Robert H. Bremmer, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 42.

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Carnegie, ed. David Narsaw, *The “Gospel of Wealth” Essay and Other Writings* (New York, Penguin: 1901, 2006), p.11.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Adam, ed., *Philanthropy, Patronage and Civil Society: Experiences from Germany, Great Britain and North America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹¹¹ Margaret E. Menninger, “The Serious Matter of True Joy: Music and Cultural Philanthropy in Leipzig, 1781-1933,” in Thomas Adams, *Philanthropy, Patronage and Civil Society: Experiences from Germany, Great Britain and North America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

to claim “membership of a superior social class,”¹¹² and emulated the philanthropic tendencies they witnessed there upon return to the U.S. Similar to the understanding of philanthropy as a key element to securing a place in society, Simone Lassig describes that the practice of philanthropic giving as serving a cleansing role for the giver. Financial sacrifice, in this understanding, is a means to the salvation to the philanthropist, which she describes as the act of cleans[ing] themselves of the “stink” of new money and becoming integrated into society through the acceptance of their gifts.¹¹³ This is also reflected in George Simmel’s essay *The Poor*, for example, as he discusses how “the motive for alms then resides exclusively in the significance of giving for the giver. When Jesus told the wealthy young man, ‘give your riches to the poor,’ what apparently mattered to him was not the poor, but rather the soul of the wealthy man.”¹¹⁴ These understandings of philanthropic giving participate in a Bourdieuan interpretation of capital-exchange, where one form of capital, in this case, economic, can be exchanged for another (i.e.: symbolic/cultural).

Another predominant explanation, however, is outlined by Wulfson who describes that twentieth century philanthropy emerged as a result of corporations getting “too big, too powerful, and guilty of antisocial and anticompetitive behaviors.”¹¹⁵ The increase and scope of corporate power led to consequent regulations on the part of the government as “anti-trust laws, banking regulations, and consumer protection laws” were all written in an attempt to restrict

¹¹² Adam, ed., *Philanthropy, Patronage and Civil Society*, p. 1.

¹¹³ Simone Lassig, *Bürgerlichkeit*, Patronage and Communal Liberalism in Germany in 1871-1914,” in Thomas Adams, *Philanthropy, Patronage and Civil Society: Experiences from Germany, Great Britain and North America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁴ George Simmel, Claire Jacobson, trans., “The Poor,” *Social Problems* 13, no. 2 (1965): 153.

¹¹⁵ Myrna Wulfson, “The Ethics of Corporate Social Responsibility and Philanthropic Ventures,” p. 135.

corporate power.¹¹⁶ On the part of the private sector, philanthropy was a means of resistance where philanthropists donated money to popular causes as a means to improve their public image and fend off top-down regulation on the scope of their size and the scope of their activities.

As Benjamin Soskis points out, however, the emerging philanthropy at the time suffered from some conceptual contradictions; whereas on one hand philanthropy was understood as means to reliably protect capital and limit regulations by ensuring garnering community acceptance, on the other, it presented uncertainty with regard the appropriate business-society relationship.¹¹⁷ The question of whether business as a whole, and large corporations in particular, has responsibilities to broader society was one that had been mostly unexamined, largely due to the prevalence of small businesses and/or business run exclusively by one person up until that point. Within the traditional framework, private corporate giving was an extension of individual giving that was located in a Christian-influenced traditional of personal benevolence. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, with the rise of large multinational corporations, an ethic that laid out institution corporate social responsibilities to society was found wanting, and thus the nineteenth century “lacked a concept of the relation of business to community—in which social responsibility was clearly seen as charge not merely upon individual conscience and concern but upon corporate resources as well.”¹¹⁸

One such way in which this ethic was formed was through a framework of stewardship. As articulated by Benjamin Soskis, American industrialists at that time, engaging in philanthropy but lacking an appropriate framework to do so, borrowed tenants of the Christian idea of

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Benjamin Soskis, “The Pre-and Early History of American Corporate Philanthropy,” Working Paper No. 3, *Minneapolis Center for Ethical Business Cultures* (2010).

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

stewardship, which located themselves in a position of stewards, taking care of their wealth not just for themselves but for society in general. *Stewardship*, coming from the Old English words *sti*, meaning “hall,” and *weard*, meaning “ward,” is understood as traditionally referring to the action of taking care of domestic duties, and has two central premises: first, the capacity to care for, manage, or control, a persons or things, and secondly, the act of being accountable for those things. As outlined in the *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, “a steward exercises power and authority but does not have license to do so in a self-serving or careless manner.”¹¹⁹ From the perspective of the business leader, then, stewardship was taken up to mean that the wealth garnered from capitalist enterprise was not for self-interest, but rather, it was the role of the business leader to steward that wealth, for the ultimate goal of social betterment in general. As Soskis puts it:

By the dictates of stewardship, men could not claim ultimate ownership over their possessions, but held them only as trustees for some higher authority—in the concept’s Protestant manifestation, God, and in its secular version, a broadly defined public.¹²⁰

Perhaps the clearest embodiment of the stewardship ethic in relation to business activities is in the actions of the philanthropists mentioned earlier, John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie. In Rockefeller’s interpretation, his capacity as a business man and his subsequent success was perceived as a divine gift that was bestowed upon him for good reason. In one interview, he states, “it is seemed that I was favored and got great increase because the Lord knew that I was going to turn around and give it right back.”¹²¹ Rockefeller, thus, perceiving that God had granted him the abilities to make money because of his very inclinations toward

¹¹⁹ J. Baird Callicott and Robert Frodeman, eds. *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy* (Detroit: Gale, 2009), p. 282.

¹²⁰ Soskis, “The Pre-and Early History of American Corporate Philanthropy,” p. 4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

generosity and public benevolence understood this as a sign that his proper role was that of steward; making money, and then distributing that wealth for the betterment of society in general. He reflects this role further in a conversation with another biographer, stating that

having been endowed with the gift which I possess, I believe it is my duty to go on making money and still more money . . . and to dispose of the money I make for the good of my fellow man according to the dictates of my conscience.¹²²

Like Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish emigrant and entrepreneur, also believed in his duties of stewardship. In his essay, “The Gospel of Wealth,” he stated that it was both desirable and inevitable that wealth be concentrated in the hands of a few, and like Rockefeller, believed that the extraordinary financial capacities of those earners should be used for public good. Unlike Rockefeller, however, he did not think these capacities were divinely appointed; rather, he believed that these capacities emerged in particular social conditions and consequently the success of the enterprise could not be separated from the society that gave rise to it. Due to the enormous opportunities afforded to people in U.S. society, people of great ambition and talent would naturally make a fortune, but this fortune wasn’t theirs alone; they must consider themselves “the mere agent and trustee for [their] poorer brethren.”¹²³ For Carnegie, however, acting as “good steward” meant that the wealth created by business talent and financial success must be directed towards such things that serve as advantageous for the progress of society at large. For Carnegie, these things included colleges and universities, libraries, hospitals, and medical research facilities; public parks and lecture halls; swimming pools, etc. It did not include, however, distributing those profits more evenly in the companies themselves, or between the workers within those companies. Keeping firmly within the

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 6.

stewardship tradition, Carnegie states that, “[t]he wealth gathered into one great stream is capable of doing more public good than if it had remained scattered in the hands of thousands, probably to be frittered away.”¹²⁴

The stewardship ethic, thus, became a normative influence at the turn of the century, and provided a narrative from which modern philanthropy could emerge and flourish.¹²⁵ Reasons as to why the stewardship became popularized, however, point to a more nuanced analysis of philanthropy in general. Indeed, as Soskis outlines, the stewardship ethic served a two-fold purpose: to both legitimize the amassing of large amounts of private capital, and to validate the transferal of this private wealth to sectors of society decided by the giver.¹²⁶ Under the stewardship ethic, therefore, the mass accumulation of wealth could be justified while remaining within the dictates of the Christian tradition of individual benevolence by pointing to the social benefits of the profit motive, as well as implying a special or unique status to the business leader that was industrious enough to earn the capital. In this way, it served to tie the concept of property rights and financial accumulation to public responsibilities, and provided a bond between self-interest and social service more generally that was crucial to the conceptual foundations of business philanthropy in the United States.¹²⁷

Stewardship, Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Sovereignty

It is, thus, in this context that a further analysis of CSR can take place. Despite differences between turn of the century philanthropy and contemporary CSR in both scale and

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

form, the marriage between business and benevolence inherent to the corporate stewardship framework, and the focus on the business leader as a *public steward*, remains an underlying assumption in CSR practices today. In one prominent business ethics text book, it is described that:

Many of today's corporate executives see themselves as stewards, or trustees, who act in the general public's interest. Although their companies are privately owned and they try to make profits for the stockholders, business leaders who follow the stewardship principle believe they have an obligation to see that everyone—particularly those in need or at risk—benefits from their firms' actions.¹²⁸

“Stewardship” forms a seminal part of the CSR lexicon with many companies, including REI and Hyatt, publishing yearly “stewardship reports,” in which they outline their responsibilities and goals for the global community. Others, such as Schlumberger, a leading technology provider for the oil and gas sector, argues that their commitment to minimizing social and environmental impacts “forms the basis of our vision of Global Stewardship, which includes a social responsibility to the people in the communities where we live and work.”¹²⁹ In a large 2017 meeting in Singapore for the investment managing industry, one commentator describes that the “overarching theme wasn't stability or security, as one might reasonably expect given the geopolitical situation. Instead, the audience sat down to discussions on stewardship.”¹³⁰

Perhaps the most apparent example of the stewardship ethic in contemporary CSR is in the framework of “conscious capitalism.” Conscious Capitalism, a discourse pioneered and popularized by John Mackey, CEO of Wholefoods, asserts that the free market model can, and

¹²⁸ Anne T. Lawrence, *Business and Society: Stakeholders, Ethics, Public Policy*, 12th ed. (New York: Mc Graw Hill, 2008), p. 46.

¹²⁹ Schlumberger, Global Stewardship, http://media.corporate-ir.net/media_files/IROL/97/97513/global_stewardship/index.html.

¹³⁰ Oliver Balch, “Deconstructing Stewardship,” *Ethical Corp*, 5 April 2017 <http://www.ethicalcorp.com/deconstructing-csr-stewardship-theory>.

must, be directed for social betterment. Mackey writes that “business needs to become holistic and integral with deeper comprehensive purposes,”¹³¹ stating that conscious capitalism has four main tenets, it must be: “spiritually evolved, [have] self-effacing servant leaders; a conscious culture; a stakeholder orientation; and a higher purpose, one that transcends profit maximization.”¹³²

Although heralded as a new paradigm, there are significant similarities between earlier notions of stewardship and contemporary conscious capitalism. Both frameworks, for example, focus on the importance of value creation beyond the financial, and both perceive the betterment of society as a goal that is compatible with that of profit creation. Indeed, according to both discourses, not only are business and social betterment compatible, but business, corporate stewardship, and the profit motive are *essential* for the improvement of society. As one proponent describes, it is the “profit motive, not government or charity [that] will create the kind of socially responsible world we want our kids and grandkids to grow up in . . . creating a win-win business model . . . is the only way to optimize value.”¹³³ This is also reflected poignantly in the title of Mackey’s book, *Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business*. In this case, the *heroic* spirit of business is in the innate capacity of business to be redirected, under the right hands, towards social improvement, and away from shallow profit-seeking behavior. According to Mackay, however, although the goals of the conscious capitalist is towards more noble ends than mere profit, this refocus will not lead to a compromise on the financial bottom

¹³¹ John Mackey, “Creating a New Paradigm for Business,” in Michael Strong, *Be the Solution: How Entrepreneurs and Conscious Capitalists Can Solve All the World’s Problems* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p. 103.

¹³² Jeremy P. Fyke and Patrice M. Buzzanell, “The Ethics of Conscious Capitalism: Wicked Problems in Leading Change and Changing Leaders,” *Human Relations* 66, no. 12 (2013): 1-37.

¹³³ James O’ Toole and David Vogel, “Two and a Half Cheers for Conscious Capitalism,” *California Management Review* 53, no. 3 (2011): 65.

line either. In a recent debate with Milton Friedman, Mackey emphasizes the point particularly, stating that there can be “little doubt that a certain amount of corporate philanthropy is simply good business and works for the long term benefit of the investors.”¹³⁴ Citing the custom of holding five, five percent off, days at Wholefoods where, for those days, five percent of all total sales are donated to various non-profits, he asserts that is not simply a loss of profits, but rather it usually brings in “hundreds of new or lapsed customers into our stores.”¹³⁵

In many ways, therefore, the notions of stewardship that formed a large part of the ideological basis for twentieth century philanthropy remains a major force in contemporary CSR. Many recent scholars, for example, argue that stewardship in CSR offers a positive alternative to earlier versions of agency theory, which harkens back to the idea of the rational self-serving business leader, intent only on private gain.¹³⁶ In contrast, stewardship lays out a business-society framework that understands the business leader as concerned about the well-being of all society and the creation of value in a broader sense, beyond mere financial objectives. Thus, like the stewardship ethic of the earlier philanthropists, the assumption remains that the business leader has a responsibility to act towards the betterment of society, and that the redistribution of wealth is best achieved by those that are the most successful economically.

Critiquing Corporate Stewardship

Despite stewardship presenting a seemingly benevolent gloss on the forces of capitalist production, the final section looks at some potential problems and contradictions with regard to

¹³⁴ Milton Friedman, John Mackay, and T. J. Rogers, “Rethinking the Social Responsibility of Business,” *Reason*, 2005, <http://reason.com/archives/2005/10/01/rethinking-the-social-responsi>

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ See Daniel Yankelovich, *Profit With Honor: The New Stage of Market Capitalism* (Yale: Yale University Press: 2007).

the stewardship ethic as normative framework in contemporary business-society relations.

The Stewardship Ethic and Depoliticized Benevolence

This understanding of stewardship as profit-friendly is evident in its first formulations. The marriage of business and public benevolence that stewardship represents not only cemented the moral narrative of early twentieth-century philanthropy, but also capitalism in general. Led largely by the dictates of the stewardship ethic, Carnegie, for example, argued that it was his duty to increase his own personal revenues as much as possible and in *The Gospel of Wealth*, he writes:

The struggle for more is completely changed from selfish or ambitious talent into a noble pursuit. The [the man of wealth] labors not for self, but for others; not to hoard; not to spend. The more he makes, the more the public gets.¹³⁷

This union [between business and benevolence] was also put forth in less demanding terms elsewhere. Cornelius Vanderbilt, the railroad tycoon who was known for his distinct lack of philanthropic inclinations, was defended upon his death by the a reporter in the New York *Evening Mail* who stated, “it is the part of the Providence that overrules all human efforts and events, that such incarnations of energy and enterprise as Mr. Vanderbilt must serve the public uses, whether they want to do it or not.”¹³⁸ Similarly, a speaker at a Baptist conference in 1893 stated, “the man who possesses a fortune is *nolens volens* a benefactor to the community. He may be a misanthrope and atheist. But if such a man moves into a Western city and begins to spend his money in the most selfish and ostentatious luxury, he is an involuntary benefactor to that city.”¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Soskis, “The Pre-and Early History of American Corporate Philanthropy,” p. 5.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Thus, using a popular interpretation of Smith's invisible hand, the stewardship ethic of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century framed an understanding of business that was in line with Christian thinking, even when the business in question was not explicitly generous or concerned with charity in a more traditional sense. There was an accepted compatibility with "the [t]he laws of the market and of God" and, as Soskis writes: "this devotion to the invisible hand could . . . push aside established notions of Christian service"¹⁴⁰ to the point where the pursuit of profit alone was a *holy act*. By arguing that the role of industrialist was that of steward, and that stewardship could only take place within the confines of a free and competitive capitalistic society, it relocated economic activity as an inherently moral endeavor. In doing so, it lauded the profit motive in capitalism as an essential component of stewardship capacities. As Rockefeller puts it:

The best philanthropy, the help that does the most good and the least harm, the help that nourishes civilization at its very root, that most widely disseminates health, righteousness, and happiness, is not what is usually called charity. It is... the investment of effort or time or money, carefully considered with relation to the power of employing people at a remunerative wage, to expand and develop the resources at hand, and to give opportunity for progress and healthful labour where it did not exist before.¹⁴¹

In this sense, then, not only does the stewardship ethic fail to question the profit drive, but it actively supports it, implying that the capacity to steward and the capacity to make profit are intimately linked. This connection is also reflected in contemporary discourses on CSR. In a recent book analyzing late stage capitalism, for example, Daniel Yankelovich argues that the stewardship ethic serves as a promising way forward between agency theory and more extreme corporate regulations; that the "stewardship ethics position . . . shares the perspective of the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ John D. Rockefeller, *Randon Reminiscences of Men and Events* (New York: Double Day 1913), pp.141-142.

business sector about profit-making. It does not regard profit-making as problematic. On the contrary, it appreciates the many uses to which profit can be put.¹⁴²

The focus on profit, however, also exposes some inherent contradictions with the concept of stewardship itself. Indeed, the first philanthropists—operating under the framework of stewardship—were met with substantial criticism from their contemporaries. William Jewett Tucker, for example, professor and future president of Dartmouth college, stated that Carnegie’s aim was to distribute wealth while “leaving the question of the original distribution unsettled, or settled only to the satisfaction of the few.”¹⁴³ A similar reflection was made by Theodore Roosevelt, the president of the United States at the time, as he noted that “no amount of charities in spending such fortunes can compensate in any way for the misconduct in acquiring them.”¹⁴⁴ Even some of the intended recipients of Carnegie’s philanthropic endeavors questioned the merits of his gifts. One in particular, a steelworker residing in an area where Carnegie just established a public library, said, “What good are libraries to me, working nearly eighteen hours a day.”¹⁴⁵

Thus, these critiques illuminate one of the core contradictions of the stewardship ethic: the ways in which the capital needed for philanthropic stewardship is accumulated can nullify the actual benefits it intended to establish. This contradiction was evident in the early philanthropy movement, as the rising industrialism that enabled the rise of philanthropy also led to great social inequality, poorer working conditions, and ecological degradation.¹⁴⁶ It is also evident in the

¹⁴² Daniel Yankelovich, *Profit With Honor: The New Stage of Market Capitalism* (Yale: Yale University Press: 2007), p. 100.

¹⁴³ Soskis, “The Pre and Early History of American Corporate Philanthropy,” p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

contemporary CSR movement as while substantial focus is placed on the values of stewardship and social responsibility, environmental and social conditions continue to decline in many parts of the world.

The contradiction also, however, exposes one of the core consequences of stewardship in terms of its potential to depoliticize corporate behavior. In other words, to strip it of its political and social context. Although philanthropy is dependent upon capitalist means of production to create large amounts of surplus profit in the first instance, and consequently cannot be separated from the impacts of those productive forces, the mask of benevolence that accompanies the notion of stewardship serve to “collapse the distance between the market and the negative impacts it has on human well-being.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, the misconduct involved in acquiring such large profit is neutralized; stewardship, in this case, rather than transform society towards overall betterment, serves, instead, to “stabilize the very system that results in poverty, disease, and environmental destruction.” This is also in line with Ben Agger’s theory of fast capitalism, which understands that the “blurred boundary between benevolence and the market is the result of a veiled discourse of stabilization that freezes the world falsely into ontological permanence.”¹⁴⁸

The Moralization of Corporate Action

In addition to depoliticization, the stewardship ethic also serves to exacerbate a potentially false and problematic synthesis between the economic and the moral. As Shamir maintains, the moralization of the economic is an ongoing phenomenon, connected to the broader project of neoliberalism, and can be recognized in the observation that “commercial

¹⁴⁷ Patricia Mooney Nickel and Angela M. Eikenberry, “A Critique of the Discourse of Marketized Philanthropy,” *American Behavior Scientist* 52, no. 7 (2009): 975.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

enterprises increasingly perform tasks that were once considered to reside within the civic domain of moral entrepreneurship and the political domain of the caring welfare state, dispensing social goods other than profits to constituencies other than their shareholders.”¹⁴⁹ The stewardship ethic seems to exacerbate this process. Indeed, one of the primary functions of the stewardship ethic is to associate private and economic activity with moral action. As discussed above, in the confines of the stewardship ethic, private activity becomes indistinguishable from moral ends, as corporate actors become moral agents through their role as social stewards, a role that is perceived to be inseparable from their position as corporate actors.

The moralization of the economic has direct effects with regard to the ontological status of corporations, their consequent governance. As Rebecca De Winter describes, “the manner in which the agency of corporations is conceptualized is significant to the extent that it shapes public expectations and influences the nature and scope of state regulation.”¹⁵⁰ Constructing the corporate actor as a moral actor allows the private actor to take on public action in a voluntary and self-regulated manner, while also providing a normative framework to resist external regulation. This is reflected clearly in how problems and solutions are conceptualized under this paradigm. Based on the assumption of a synthesis between the economic and the moral, the problem of corporate misbehavior, or indeed, inequality, is perceived, not as the result of institutional problems relating to market and private governance, but rather, as the result, of a “few bad eggs.” Consequently, the solution does not entail a restructuring of regulatory models, but rather a renewed focus on proper stewardship. As Hart describes:

¹⁴⁹ Ronen Shamir, “The Age of Responsibilization: On Market-Embedded Morality,” *Economy and Society* 37, no. 1 (2008): 1-19, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Rebecca De Winter, “The Anti-Sweatshop Movement: Constructing Corporate Moral Agency in the Global Apparel Industry,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 15, no. 2 (2001): 99-115, p. 99.

Business ethicists rarely appeal to market-failure correction . . . when proposing more rigorous standards for ethical business conduct, but rather appeal to any number of principles and values: ideals of social responsibility and stewardship, often via notions of social contracts and a “license to operate;” ideals of corporate citizenship . . . Sustainable development . . . traditional Judeo-Christian or Aristotelian virtues and vices; and sometimes liberal-democratic norms of justice, fairness, equality, and democracy.¹⁵¹

Thus, by focusing on the stewardship capacities of business, the private sector is understood as both the problem and the solution to social and economic problems. This is also exacerbated by frameworks of meritocracy embedded into the stewardship framework. Because stewards are interpreted to be a unique and privileged position, it is maintained the private sector actors not only can, but should, be allowed to use their moral judgement in an unregulated way. As Lynch Wood et al. puts it, “the voluntary approach encourages the types of innovative CSR practices that additional layers of regulation may impede.”¹⁵² Within this framework, therefore, not only is external regulation unnecessary, but even possibly harmful, with the assumption that increased “political control of corporate activities would produce greater negative consequences than would the voluntary assumption of responsibility by corporations.”¹⁵³

The stewardship ethic, thus, by denoting moral authority to the private sector thus helps to “repackage corporate actors as moral agents committed to consensual, deliberate, governance, aimed at producing socio-economic goods and opposed to confrontational agonistic governance, which allegedly produces more harm than good.”¹⁵⁴ As some authors point out, however, the equation of the economic and the moral and the construction of the corporate moral actor can be dangerous, in that it can create a false ontology of business-society relations. Indeed, as Carl

¹⁵¹ Wayne Norman, “Business Ethics as Self-Regulation: Why Principles that Ground Regulations Should be Used to Ground Beyond Compliance Norms as Well,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 102 (2011): 43-57 p. 45.

¹⁵² Gary Lynch-Wood et al, “The Over-Reliance on Self-Regulation in CSR,” *Business Ethics* 18, no. 1 (2009): 52-65, p. 52.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Jennifer Lawrence and Sarah Marie Wiebe, eds., *BioPolitical Disaster* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 54.

Rhodes notes, corporate business ethics has served to “build corporate sovereignty” by empowering the private sector and giving private actors and multinational corporations the capacity to “fend off demands for external regulatory control . . . by inculcating a system whereby corporations assert that they can regulate themselves.”¹⁵⁵ The sovereignty that stewardship yields is made more problematic by the assertion that in many cases, corporations partake in good deeds only “to the extent that it makes business sense to do so.”¹⁵⁶ Indeed, as Rhodes points out, “corporations have largely failed to responsibly use whatever autonomy and discretion they possessed to produce fair and generous outcomes for their various stakeholder groups.”¹⁵⁷

From the perspective of CSR, then, underlying ideas of stewardship may be one reason being the contemporary dominance of CSR frameworks that insist upon self-regulatory and voluntary mechanisms. Rooted in ideas about corporate meritocracy and notions of the “moral corporation,” underlying assumptions of corporate stewardship allow the private sector the normative tools to fend off external measures and gain significant influence with regard to the very meaning and conditions of contemporary CSR and private sector philanthropy.

Conclusion: Stewardship, Sovereignty, And Social Movements

Corporate stewardship, then, is closely aligned with corporate sovereignty as stewardship both depoliticizes the nature of corporate action by masking it in benevolence, while also

¹⁵⁵ Rhodes, “Democratic Business Ethics: Volkswagen’s Emissions Scandals and the Disruption of Corporate Sovereignty,” p. 1505.

¹⁵⁶ David Vogel, “Is There a Market for Virtue? The Business Case for Corporate Social Responsibility,” *California Management Review* 47, no. 4 (2005): 19–45.

¹⁵⁷ Rhodes, “Democratic Business Ethics: Volkswagen’s Emissions Scandals and the Disruption of Corporate Sovereignty,” p. 1505.

constructing a view of the corporation as a moral actor, and thus collapsing the distinction between economic and moral action. In this sense, stewardship, as an underlying normative framework for business-society relations, may support and help legitimize voluntary and self-regulatory frameworks of corporate social responsibility. If business leaders are rightfully stewards of their wealth for the betterment of broader society, then profit-seeking behavior is both necessary for a flourishing society and business leaders ought to be free to act according to their will. If corporations are moral, inherently, why regulate them?

As I have discussed, however, stewardship presents some conceptual and practical difficulties. Conceptually, as scholars have pointed out, the ability of private sector actors to amass wealth to subsequently steward (for social improvement) is premised on industrial activity and profit seeking behavior that can cause harm and more social and ecological destruction. Practically, the popular support of corporate stewardship can lead to difficulties in enforcing corporate regulation when regulation may be necessary.

As this pertains to social movements, it also leads to further difficulties. The promulgation of voluntary CSR policies has led to an increase in partnerships and cooperation between environmental groups and private actors as the private sector shifts to CSR policies in place of external environmental regulation. As I discuss in the next chapter, however, rising engagement between private actors and environmental NGOs in this manner may have a impact on the recipient organizations or movement, leading to undue influence and potential conflicts of interest in the domain of environmental governance.

CHAPTER 4

PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT AND POWERFUL ENVIRONMENTALISMS:

A FAUSTIAN BARGAIN

About halfway through the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona in 2008, a video produced by the World Business Council on Sustainable Development was shown to the audience. It opens with three people standing on a suspended white platform, hovering over a bed of clouds. The platform is tipping perilously to one side and then the other, with the three people desperately trying to maintain their balance and not fall off. As the camera draws closer, we can see that one man is identified as “Government,” one woman labelled “NGO,” and other, “Business.” On the platform with them are three translucent cubes, marked “food,” “water,” and “climate,” also sliding ominously from one end of the platform to the next. Although initially disorganized and unclear, the people gradually learn that only when they arrange the cubes in the middle of the platform can they save themselves. They begin to catch the cubes and push them towards the center, dropping two out of the three briefcases they were holding, labelled “ignorance” and “fear,” on the way. Finally, they successfully push all three blocks to the center, as one final briefcase, marked “trust” remains. The video concludes with a shot of them standing by their cubes, on a stable platform, smiling at one another, seemingly happily with the teamwork which led to their success.

The video’s message does not take too much interpretation: ecological stability and ecosystem health can be only be achieved if NGOs, businesses, and governments work together. It is also not very novel. Messages of collaboration, such as this one, are now dominant in recent environmental politics, and, in particular, calls for environmental organizations to “partner” with corporations and other agents in the private sector are increasingly common.¹⁵⁸ Whereas environmental groups were once known for their combative tendencies, a greater number now welcome these alliances. Many of the leading environmental NGOs, for example, place

¹⁵⁸ Mac Chapin, “A Challenge to Conservationists.” *World Watch* 17, no. 6 (2005): 17-31.

significant emphasis on collaborative strategies and highlight the importance of harnessing the power of the market and working with their partners in business in mission statements, annual reports, and conferences.

One implication of the rise in partnerships between environmental NGOs and the private sector is an increase in capital flowing from the private sector to the NGO sector. Currently, some of the larger environmental groups receive over fifty percent of their total funding from private foundations and corporate philanthropy, and many organizations list as many as 1,000 corporate financial sponsors on their websites and annual reports.¹⁵⁹ In addition to increases in capital, there is a growth in corporate presence in NGOs, manifested through board membership, project cooperation, and attendance and organization of international environmental meetings. As described by George Holmes, over sixty percent of board members in the largest three environmental organizations now come from the private sector, significantly outnumbering those board members with scientific backgrounds, and often taking high ranking positions such as president and director roles.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, major ecological projects have corporate sponsors that not only provide money, but also may influence the particularities of the project, as evidenced in recent partnerships with Chesapeake Energy and the Sierra Club, and others.¹⁶¹

There is a substantial literature on this growing engagement between environmental groups and the private sector.¹⁶² Much of the research, however, is focused on particular

¹⁵⁹ George Holmes, "Biodiversity for Billionaires."

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Bryan Walsh, "How the Sierra Club Took Millions from Natural Gas Industry—and Why They Stopped," *Time Magazine*, 2 February, 2012, <http://science.time.com/2012/02/02/exclusive-how-the-sierra-club-took-millions-from-the-natural-gas-industry-and-why-they-stopped/>.

¹⁶² See Jim Igoe, John, K. Neves and Dan Brockington, "A Spectacular Eco-Tour around the Historic Bloc: Theorising the Convergence of Biodiversity Conservation and Capitalist Expansion," in Dan Brockington and Rosaleen Duffy, eds., *Capitalism and Conservation* (Wiley-Blackwell: Malden, Mass, 2011); MacDonald, "The Devil is in the (Bio)Diversity: Private Sector "Engagement" and the Restructuring of Biodiversity Conservation."

partnerships, or on the field of conservation in general. In this chapter, I seek to contribute to the debate by investigating the implications of growing private sector engagement on the normative structure of environmentalism in a broader sense. I argue that despite tendencies towards characterizing these alliances as pragmatic and/or greenwashing, they are often more closely related to what Bill Adams describes as “Faustian bargains,” in that engagements such as these usually entail transactions between deeply different power dynamics, where one party benefits more than the other.¹⁶³ Informed by a Gramscian analysis, I explore whether private sector engagement in the politics of environmentalism can be understood as a form of hegemony, where private sector actions contain oppositional environmentalism by controlling what Gramsci calls the “war of position;” in this case, the ideological terrain of the environmental movement. To this end, I analyze the work of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development as one possible illustration of this process.

¹⁶³ William Adams, “Sleeping with the Enemy.”

CHAPTER 4

ENVIRONMENTALISM AND PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

The modern environmental movement in the United States, although dating back to the early nineteenth century, came to fruition in the sixties and seventies. During those decades, resistance to dams, nuclearization, and broader projects of industrialization increased dramatically. In 1962, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, drawing awareness to and criticizing the mass use of pesticides, specifically DDT. Carson's book was joined subsequently by a host of others, all warning of the dangers of population increases, unregulated economic growth, and industrial activity on the environment, including Steward Udall's *The Quiet Crisis*,¹⁶⁴ Paul Ehrlick's *The Population Bomb*, etc.¹⁶⁴ Messages of ecological harm and calls for a restructuring of social principles found willing audiences during this time, with the women, civil rights, and anti-war movements reflecting and coalescing to form a wider anti-establishment spirit intent on transformative societal change.

The anti-establishment trend of the movement also informed a generally antagonistic attitude towards the private sector, and large corporations in general. The dominant view, at least in the early movement, was that the values and objectives of the environmental movement were deeply incompatible with the values and objectives of the private sector. The environmentalist Edward Abbey famously expressed this critique about the capitalist industrialist economy in proclaiming, "growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell."¹⁶⁵ Other anti-capitalist, anti-corporate, sentiments remained pervasive during the early years, with the overall assumption being that to be an environmentalist, you also had to be critical of modern industrial

¹⁶⁴ See Steward Udall, *The Quiet Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963); Paul Ehrlick, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968).

¹⁶⁵ Edward Abbey, *The Journey Home: Some Words in Defense of the American West* (New York: Plume, 1991).

capitalism. The techniques of the earlier movement also mirrored its more radical edge, as environmentalists adopted combative strategies designed to disrupt commerce and signal transformative shifts in social relations. On the first Earth Day, for example, students in Florida burned a car to protest the pollution caused by the automobile industry and in San Francisco, students poured oil in a water feature at the offices of the Standard Oil Company. Other radical strategies manifested more so in content rather than in form. Some early reformers, for example, used litigation techniques to attempt to bring about a national constitutional right to a clean environment.¹⁶⁶ Although this strategy was never achieved, it reflected the loftier goals of earlier parts of the movement, as well as the inclinations towards systemic change.

During the late seventies, eighties and nineties, however, these radical tactics and goals, as well as the anti-corporate sentiment, began to subside. Environmentalism achieved tremendous success, in both capturing public attention and changing legislation, with fourteen major environmental legislations passing between 1970 and 1977 alone. As noted by Cary Caglienese, however, as the environmental movement popularized, the kinds of activism and forms of protest shifted towards more incremental strategies.¹⁶⁷ Instead of following the grassroots activism of the earlier movement, environmental groups switched to insider political strategies, working within existing power structures, focusing on incremental-based changes and emulating legal strategies used by other establishment interest groups in Washington D.C. This switch led to, as Caglienese describes, “legislative and administrative lobbying, along with strategic use of media and electoral efforts becom[ing] mainstays in the environmentalist

¹⁶⁶ Cary Caglienese, “Social Movements, Law, and Society: The Institutionalization of the Environmental Movement,” (2001). *Faculty Scholarship*, http://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/faculty_scholarship/1404.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

toolkit.”¹⁶⁸ The use of litigation also became more incremental. In contrast to the transformative objectives of the earlier movement, later environmentalists were more content to “maintain and enforce the legislative victories they [already] had” rather than advance a more transformative agenda.¹⁶⁹

As the environmental movement became, therefore, a more institutionalized presence in the mainstream political domain, it also led to a change in both a methodology (the forms of resistance) and goals (what the mainstream movement wanted to achieve). Embedded within this institutionalization was a further shift in the relationship to the private sector. While in the seventies and eighties the private sector remained a source of contention and corporations were perceived to be generally destructive of the cause of environmental protection, things started to alter gradually in the eighties and nineties as businesses and environmental groups gained closer ties to one another through sponsorship deals, philanthropy, partnerships and corporate social responsibility initiatives. One of the first formal alliances was with the Environmental Defense Fund and McDonalds in 1990, which had the goal of lessening the impacts of packaging and waste without affecting the company’s bottom line. Another prominent example was the partnership between Greenpeace and the German company Foron and the Dortmund Institute in 1992, who famously joined together to design and promote hydrocarbon refrigeration technology. At the time, it received substantial criticism from outside, particularly from other Greenpeace workers and offices throughout Europe. Many campaigners and supporters

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

perceived the deal to be a corporate “sell out.” It also damaged Greenpeace’s image as an “environmental attack dog” on the corporate sector.¹⁷⁰

Despite lingering criticism with regard specific deals, however, the relationship between business and environmentalism generally moved from one of hostility to one of constructive engagement. The renewed focus on engagement, rather than antagonism, arose in conjunction with a decrease in mandatory corporate restrictions as businesses began to voluntarily adopt environmental goals, get involved with environmental groups via philanthropy, and establish green initiatives. As Katherine Mangu-Ward puts it

The idea of the rich corporate villain gleefully dirtying Mother Earth is powerful and appealing. Children of the 1980s encountered this supervillain in comics, movies, public awareness videos, and science textbooks. Times were good for mandatory recycling, for mandatory emissions reductions, for anything mandatory aimed at restraining corporate polluter. But in the '90s, something peculiar started happening. The men in suits were still middle-aged, round, and white. They were still just as concerned with profit and golf. Very few of them sported tie-dyed attire, aside from the occasional whimsical Jerry Garcia tie. But the men in suits started caring. Or at least acting like they cared. Which, if you ask a spotted owl, is the same thing.¹⁷¹

Thus, as the perception of business as eco-villain subsided, coinciding with a decrease in mandatory corporate restrictions, businesses became allies, rather than enemies, of the environmental cause. This reconfiguration emerged in the backdrop of changing political-economic structures. In the early movement, for example, it was predominantly the role of the state to ensure environmental regulation and monitor corporate activity. As environmental governance gradually shifted towards international bodies, however, such as the European Union and United Nations, corporations rallied against the command-control regulation of the earlier

¹⁷⁰ M. May Seitanidi and Andrew Crane, eds., *Social Partnerships and Responsible Business: A Research Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 120.

¹⁷¹ Katherine Mangu-Ward, “The Age of Corporate Environmentalism,” *Reason*, 1 Feb, 2006, <http://reason.com/archives/2006/02/01/the-age-of-corporate-environmentalism>.

model, and instead promoted voluntary measures, most notably, non-binding corporate social responsibility policies and practices. These led, then, to companies adopting green initiatives on their own accord, rather than accepting external regulation.

From the perspective of many environmental organizations, this alliance with the private sector was welcomed as a new and important source of funding. Mac Chapin notes, for example, that as funding to environmental non-governmental organizations decreased and membership rates declined in the eighties, some of the largest conservation organizations began concerted efforts to attract funding from elsewhere, most notably from multilateral organizations and the private sector. To do so, he argues, environmental groups, such as the World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, and the Nature Conservancy “reformulated their mission statements to focus on what they term large-scale conservation’ approaches.”¹⁷² These new approaches, described as “ambitious” and even “visionary,” departed from the more traditional place-based methods of earlier frameworks and focused instead on large eco-systems (usually in the Southern hemisphere) with high biodiversity rates, describing them vividly with terms such as “hotspots,” “ecoregions,” and impressing potential funders with satellite imagery and GIS presentations of large expanses of potential conservation areas.¹⁷³ These attempts proved successful. Although some groups, such as The Nature Conservancy, had long received sponsorship from businesses, this increased rapidly in the nineties. In 2004, for example, The Nature Conservancy had 1,900 corporate sponsors, receiving \$225 million in 2002, and Conservation International had almost 250 corporations, donating \$9 million in 2003.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Chapin, “A Challenge to Conservationists.”

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Alliances between environmental groups and the private sector have grown considerably since then. Now, not only do the bigger environmental organizations have corporate sponsors, but the majority of the leading environmental groups have corporate funders of some kind, with only a minority of groups choosing not to partner with corporations.¹⁷⁵ In addition to sponsorship, corporate-NGO partnerships have also become a mainstay in both conservation and sustainable development projects, and private sector groups, such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), are often prominent actors in international environmental meetings and environmental governance more broadly.¹⁷⁶

Indeed, the extent to which the private sector, and private sector engagements, is now normalized into the field of environmental protection is unprecedented. As MacDonald notes

Even just 20 years ago, the reputations of conservation organizations would have been seriously compromised if knowledge of these ‘engagements’ had become public. But today the logos of conservation organizations, like IUCN, Conservation International, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and Birdlife International appear side-by-side on the covers of reports or in advertisements, with those of extractive industries like Shell, Rio Tinto, Total and Holcim. Appearing in different vernacular guises—sponsorships, agreements, partnerships—these private sector engagements have become almost ubiquitous among conservation organizations, and it is increasingly common to see senior executives of larger organizations sharing convention stages and travelling with senior officers of companies historically engaged in environmentally and socially destructive activities.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Andrew Hoffman, “Shades of Green,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, November, 2009: 240-249.

¹⁷⁶ William K. Carroll, “Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in a Global Field.”

¹⁷⁷ Kenneth MacDonald, “Business, Biodiversity and New Fields of Conservation,” *Conservation & Society* 8, no. 4 (2010): 256-275 p. 260.

Bright Green Pragmatists

Scholarship that addresses this growing closeness between the corporate sector and environmental organizations generally falls into either a positive or negative camp. On the positive side, scholars maintain that partnering with the private sector is often simply the pragmatic thing to do. Keith Epstein and Alana Conner, for example, delineate two kinds of environmental organization: the pragmatic and the pure. While the pragmatic groups tend to have closer connections to corporations and engage in more incremental action, the purists usually have less financial connections with the private sector and are more involved in radical activism.¹⁷⁸ Pinpointing two in particular, they write:

Sea Shepherd is more ideologically pure, with its long history of uncompromising stances, radical actions, and contempt for corporations. Greenpeace, in contrast, is becoming more pragmatic, with its recent history of working with Coca-Cola, General Electric, and other corporate giants to create greener products and processes.¹⁷⁹

Dichotomous alignments such as these are not necessarily novel in environmental discourse. From the beginning of the modern environmental movement, ideas of weaker and stronger environmentalism have existed. Arne Naess, for example, distinguished his deep ecology, a call for a radical reconstruction of social norms on the basis of ecological principles, by contrasting it with shallow ecology, a more incremental technology-focused response to ecological concerns.¹⁸⁰ Before that, the conservation-preservation divide of the late nineteenth century displayed similar tendencies, with preservation being perceived as a stronger, purer,

¹⁷⁸ Alana Conner and Keith Epstein, "Harnessing Purity and Pragmatism," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, October, 2007, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/harnessing_purity_and_pragmatism.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movement. A Summary," *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 16, no. 1-4 (1973): 95-100.

stance towards environmental protection, while conservation was understood as working within, and maintaining, systems of capitalism exploitation of nature. Indeed, even academic debates about intrinsic and instrumental valuation of nature are influenced by, and reproduce, traditional assumptions of a dualistic response to environmental problems, with philosophers and other academics often taking up the position of one side or the other.

Conner and Epstein maintain, however, that contemporary tensions are heightened by growing private sector engagement in environmental organizations and the consequent rising schism between the two sides, leading, at times, to significant hostility. Paul Watson, for example, director of Sea Shepherd, allegedly called Greenpeace the “Avon ladies of the environmental movement” and “a bunch of wimps.”¹⁸¹ Similarly, Timothy G. Hermach, founder of the Native Forest Council, criticized the Nature Conservancy for selling land in Texas to trustees which ultimately became fodder for the oil and gas sector, calling the organization the “real estate company that cares.”¹⁸² Hermach also questioned the idea that working with the private sector was pragmatic at all, stating, “pragmatism, as the term is being used by most of Gang Green, is just a justification for being dishonest.” In response, Steven J. McCormick of the Nature Conservancy wrote that “you have to sort of admire the nobility and passion and purity behind [Hermach’s stance.] But on the other hands, it’s rare you get much out of it.”¹⁸³ This tension is also commented on by Andrew Hoffman, who puts it this way:

In the eyes of many, a schism is emerging between two camps of environmentalists: the *dark greens* and the *bright greens*. The dark greens . . . seek radical social change to solve environmental problems, often by confronting corporations. The bright green ENGOS—such as Conservation International and the Environmental Defense Fund—

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

work within the system, often in close alliance with corporations, to solve environmental problems.¹⁸⁴

Epstein and Conner contend, however, that despite this growing gulf between the dark greens and the bright greens, “all social movements need a variety of ideologies.”¹⁸⁵ While the purer groups call out corporate misbehavior and demand greater accountability, the pragmatic groups pursue smaller, incremental changes, which often lead to the most significant improvements. The underlying notion of symbiosis here is also perpetuated by the concept of the “radical flank effect,” the idea that the more moderate organizations are advantaged by the existence of more radical, conflict-oriented groups because they are perceived to be more reasonable in relation to their radical counterparts, and consequently, look like more inviting partners to governments and corporations. The authors assert, further, that “without the subtle legwork of pragmatic organizations, pure nonprofits would enjoy considerably fewer results from their actions.”¹⁸⁶ In this understanding then, pragmatic groups, although somewhat compromised, ultimately get more done for environmental protection. A similar conclusion is reached by Andrew Hoffman, who, although demonstrating that there are many kinds of organizations, not just pure or pragmatic, contends that all “shades of green” are necessarily for a flourishing and successful movement, and that the pragmatic groups tend to be more influential overall.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Hoffman, “Shades of Green,” p. 240.

¹⁸⁵ Conner and Keith, “Harnessing Purity and Pragmatism.”

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Hoffman, “Shades of Green.”

Or... Greenwashing

Other scholarship, however, is less optimistic about the rise of private sector engagements in environmentalism, and label much of the engagement as “greenwashing.” Greenwashing, despite having no universal consensus, refers largely to public misinformation or miscommunication for the purpose of reputation management. The term itself was coined by Jay Westerveld in 1986. As an undergraduate on a research trip in Fiji in 1983, he noticed that a hotel nearby his own accommodation had an “eco-friendly” towel policy that seemed in discord with their expansionist attitude to development. Three years later, in a critical essay he wrote for a New York literary magazine, he described the hotels outward stance of “saving the planet” and their simultaneous penchant for development, as greenwashing, writing—“wash my towels please, just don’t ‘greenwash’ me.”¹⁸⁸

Magali Delmas and Vanessa Cuerel Burbano describe greenwashing as comprising two factors: “poor environmental performance and positive communication about environment performance.”¹⁸⁹ The logic behind greenwashing is usually understood as operating in the intersection between a firm’s recognition that consumers want to buy ecological and socially responsible products, but their unwillingness to compromise profit in order to produce sustainably. A primary aspect of greenwashing, then, is deception and/or gross exaggeration, with greenwashing understood as the ultimate divorce between communication and reality. The phenomenon of greenwashing is also understood to be pervasive, and currently reaching “epic

¹⁸⁸ John Sullivan, “‘Greenwashing’ Gets His Goat,” *Times Herald Record*, 1 August, 2009 <http://www.recordonline.com/article/20090801/News/908010329>.

¹⁸⁹ Magali A Delmas and Vanessa Cuerel Burbano, “The Drivers of Greenwashing,” *California Management Review* 53, no. 1 (2011): 65.

proportions.”¹⁹⁰ Terra Choice, an environmental marketing agency, conducted a study in 2011 that analyzed the claims of 1,018 “green” products in the United States and Canada. They found that all of the products, bar one, made deceptive claims, that were either “demonstrably false or risked misleading consumer.”¹⁹¹

In addition to greenwashed products, critics often use the term to describe current partnership between environmental groups and corporations. Chesapeake Energy’s partnership with Sierra Club and the Sierra Clubs subsequent promotion of natural gas as an alternative to coal and a “bridge fuel” to renewable energy was described as a classic case of greenwashing by many critics who maintained that Chesapeake was partnering with the group in order to put a positive sheen on their fracking activities. Further, in Johann Hari’s 2010 exposé in *The Nation* dealing with funding from “Big Oil” to conservation groups, she maintains that the oil companies were primarily donating money for the purpose of reputation management, rather than authentic ecological concern. She writes:

They [corporations such as Shell and BP] saw it as valuable reputation insurance: every time they were criticized for their massive emissions of warming gases, or for being involved in the killing of dissidents who wanted oil funds to go to the local population, or an oil spill that had caused irreparable damage, they wheeled out their shiny green awards, purchased with "charitable" donations, to ward off the prospect of government regulation.¹⁹²

Additionally, in 2008, Shell dropped a sponsorship campaign with a wildlife photography exhibition in the UK because of pressure from environmental groups such as Friends of the Earth, who accused the company of “using the event to greenwash its environmental

¹⁹⁰ Tiffany Hsu, “Skepticism Grows Over Products Touted as Eco-Friendly,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 May, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/21/business/la-fi-greenwash-20110521>.

¹⁹¹ TerraChoice, “The Seven Sins of Greenwashing,” 2009, <http://sinsofgreenwashing.org/findings/greenwashing-report-2009/>.

¹⁹² Johann Hari, “The Wrong Kind of Green,” *The Nation*, 22 March, 2010, <https://www.thenation.com/article/wrong-kind-green-2/>.

credentials.”¹⁹³ Indeed, as Corpwash states, we give out “bimonthly Greenwash awards to corporations that put more money, time and energy into slick PR campaigns aimed at promoting their eco-friendly images, than they do to actually protecting the environment.”¹⁹⁴ Under that definition, any private sector engagement in mainstream environmentalism that places more focus on sponsorship and sustainability “campaigns” than on their own performance can be classified as greenwash and consequently critiqued.

Faustian Bargains: The Case of the World Business
Council for Sustainable Development

Both pragmatism and greenwashing, however, suffer from some conceptual and practical limitations as ways to explain and frame contemporary private sector engagement in environmentalism. Accounts of pragmatism, for example, although acknowledging the potential of co-optation on the part of the environmental organization, generally maintains that the threat—and reality—of independence-loss is compensated for by the increase of influence and effectiveness the organizations enjoys from their corporate partnership. They tend not to explore the effects of co-optation beyond the individual organizations, nor the notion of effectiveness (what constitutes “more effective”). Further, accounts of pragmatism generally overlook the intent of the corporation or foundation, generally ignoring the question of why the private actor is willing to partner with/sponsor the environmental group in the first place.

Greenwashing, in contrast, tends to over focus on the so-called bad intentions of the organizations, and concentrate less on the consequences of the greenwashing behavior on the

¹⁹³ Isabel Oakeshott, “Vestey’s Vegan Grandson See off Shell,” *CorpWatch*, 29 January, 2008, <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=14920>.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

recipient organization. Accounts of greenwashing generally perceive it to be a strategy of reputation management and stabilization, rather than an active attempt to shape environmental agendas.

Further, both accounts—pragmatism and greenwashing —predominantly assume a dichotomous understanding of the NGO-corporate relationship, treating both sectors (the public and private) as autonomous actors, often with the NGO representing the “good guys” and the private sector “the bad guys.” I maintain, in contrast, that contemporary private sector engagement in environmentalism is marked by an ever-growing *fluidity* of boundaries between business and environmental groups as both grow closer in ideology and practice. As MacDonald notes,

The vocabulary of ‘green’ and ‘greens’—have traveled beyond the ideological barricades of environmental organizations and been adopted by the corporate sector, just as the language and corporate structure of business and management has become common parlance within many environmental organizations.¹⁹⁵

This is implicit in the concept of “nature 2.0,” as described by Bram Büscher. As he presents it, conservation organizations are increasingly turning to corporate methods to “sell” biodiversity and the protection of nature through commodified (online) experiences of pristine nature, social media, and ecotourism, leading to new, commodified, and marketized representations of nature.¹⁹⁶ This approach is further reflected in the growing use of financial incentives and market frameworks for nature protection, such as payments for ecosystem services and species banking, as well as the simultaneous, but less authentic, “greening” of business as highlighted by corporate sustainability reports and environmental stewardship

¹⁹⁵ Kenneth Iain MacDonald, “Grabbing ‘Green’: Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and the Production of the Green Economy,” p. 45.

¹⁹⁶ Bram Büscher, “Nature 2.0: Exploring and Theorizing the Links between New Media and Nature Conservation,” *News, Media and Society* 18, no. 5 (2016): 726-743.

awards. Indeed, many corporations highlight environmental stewardship as an objective on the same par with profit-creation.

From this perspective, private sector engagement in organization may result in broader ideological and material re-configurations that are generally unacknowledged in popular accounts. Bill Adams, for example, argues that partnership between corporations and environmental groups may be accurately described as “Faustian bargains.”¹⁹⁷ Like Faust, who makes a deal with Mephistopheles (the devil) in order to obtain power and wisdom in return for his soul, Adams suggests a similar compromise is being struck when environmental groups partner with the corporate sector. Although environmental groups receive more power by increased contact with powerful actors, they, too, are at risk of losing their “soul” by “giving up their . . . objection to the destructiveness of capitalism,” becoming more corporate-like and arguably distancing themselves from much of their membership base.¹⁹⁸ As private sector engagement in environmentalism is growing in all forms, beyond mere partnerships to include business groups taking up places as major stakeholders at international environmental conferences, and as market norms and values are increasingly entering into the lexicon and practices of environmental policies and frameworks, it is possible that the environmental movement as a whole has entered into a Faustian bargain of sorts, “selling its soul” and leading to significant normative and practical change in the realm of environmental governance.

To investigate the potential of private sector engagement in mainstream environmentalisms to lead to broader ideological and material change, then, I analyze one example of contemporary private sector engagement in environmentalism by way of the World

¹⁹⁷ Adams, “Sleeping With the Enemy: Biodiversity, Corporations and the Green Economy.”

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

Business Council for Sustainable Development, a prominent business group involved in environmental governance through partnership with environmental and conservation groups, engagement in international environmental conferences, and sponsorship deals.

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBSCD) was established in January 1995 in response to the first international UN Earth Summit held in Rio De Janeiro in 1992, with the aim of molding a business response to sustainable development. It was a merger of two independent organizations: the Business Council for Sustainable Development and the World Industry Council for the Environment. The origins of the first, The Business Council for Sustainable Development, can be traced back to the Earth summit of 1992 itself, when Maurice Strong, the then Secretary General of the United Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) asked Stephen Schmidheiny, a businessman from Switzerland, to be chief adviser for business and industry. Schmidheiny subsequently created a forum called the Business Council for Sustainable Development, bringing together a large number of business elites and members of industry, under the auspices of gaining a business voice for sustainable development. The second organization, the World Industry Council for the Environment, originated in the International Chamber of Commerce: in 1990, a working group led by Peter Scupholme of British Petroleum and W. Ross Stephen III of Du Pont established a Business Charter for Sustainable Development. This was introduced in Rotterdam at the Second World Industry Conference on Environmental Management in 1991, and was followed up by a series of other document and reports, all designed to craft an industry response to ecological issues.

The two organizations, then, merged in 1995 into the WBSCD, becoming the “most authoritative and pre-eminent business voice on sustainable development.”¹⁹⁹ Since then, the WBSCD, has grown considerably. It now boasts a 200 company membership, with its member companies representing a combined revenue of more than 8.5 trillion US dollars, and employing up to nineteen million people.²⁰⁰ Most of the members are American and European companies, and include some of the largest in the world, including: Shell International, General Motors, Monsanto, British Petroleum, Dow Chemicals, Unilever, Fiat Auto, Johnson & Johnson, General Motors, Toyota, Philips Electronics, among others. Although not explicitly stated, the focus of the organization is predominantly on large corporate interests. While small companies are not prohibited from joining, the high membership rate of approximately 75,000 dollars a year provides a barrier, leading, to the “priority and focus of the organization [being] decidedly on issues of greater concern to large corporations.”²⁰¹ Aside from the annual fee, companies also have to be explicitly invited to join, and must promise to publish a yearly sustainability report, and have it reviewed by the organization.

On WBSCD’s website, it is described as a “global, CEO-led organization of over 200 leading businesses working together to accelerate the transition to a sustainable world,”²⁰² and its members are invited to join on the basis that “the collective voice of a cross-sectoral and global body like the WBSCD offers companies greater weight in the sustainable development debate than they would have otherwise have singly.”²⁰³ In order to provide this influence, it publishes

¹⁹⁹ Adil Najam, “World Business Council for Sustainable Development: The Greening of Business of Greenwash,” *Yearbook of International Co-Operation On Environment And Development*, 1999: 65-75.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² See <http://www.wbcsd.org/Overview/About-us>.

²⁰³ Najam, “World Business Council for Sustainable Development.”

reports on sustainability, attends and organizes workshops at international meetings, promotes corporate social responsibility initiatives, orchestrates education programs at university level, publishes books, etc. A main emphasis in the organization is on collaboration, partnership and liaison, and the list of organizations and actors it partners includes the World Bank, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the European Union, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate change, World Wildlife Fund, etc.

Influence

The primary goal of the organization is influence, and on this front, it is undoubtedly a success. It was identified as the “most influential forum” for companies on CSR by a 2003 World Bank study. A 2006 survey by Globescan found that fifty four percent of people surveyed thought that WBSCD will play a “major role” in sustainable development, with only the European Union receiving a higher score.²⁰⁴

The WBSCD is involved in major conferences both as active participant and organizer. As participant, the council is included in higher level negotiations, in the creation of policy suggestions and documents, and in the organization of panels and sessions. At the World Conservation Congress in 2012, for example, the WBSCD held a series of workshops and events designed to promote the role of business and market mechanisms in environmental governance.²⁰⁵ At the UN climate conference in the same year in Doha, the council, along with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), organized a Global Business Day, bringing together members of the business community and their “partners” in conservation to provide

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ MacDonald, “The Devil is in the Biodiversity: Neoliberalism and the Restructuring of Biodiversity Conservation.”

business perspectives on matters of sustainable development and biodiversity. In addition to the council's prominence in environmental meetings and documents, it is also involved in partnerships with governments and other public actors. In 2017, for example, the council partnered with Yale University to establish the WBSCD Leadership Program, which sees program participants learn and apply concepts of sustainable development in business practices, developed by periods of on-location training and group work. In response to the partnership, Yale university professor, Brad Gentry, stated that "WBSCD is leading the effort to bring actionable science about the resource systems on which we all depend to networks of global and local businesses around the world."²⁰⁶ The council is also an official member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), one of the only private sector groups to be so, and it frequently partners with conservation groups, such as the World Wildlife Fund and The Nature Conservancy, as well as governments and global institutions, to initiate projects and establish environmental policy soft law documents.

The influence of the council, however, is not neutral, nor is the version of sustainable development promoted in their policy, conferences, and education programs free of bias. Rather, the framework of sustainable development put forth by the WBSCD is embedded in private sector norms and values. It places corporate self-regulation and the use of market mechanisms of environmental protection as defining features of environmental governance, witnessed most apparently in the type of sustainable development schemes established by WBSCD. In 1997, for example, the council initiated the Global Mining Initiative in partnership with many leading corporations in the mining sector. This initiative advocated a CSR framework of self-regulation

²⁰⁶ Yale News, "For Yale, WBSCD, Sustainability is Good Business," 8 April, 2014, <https://news.yale.edu/2014/04/08/yale-wbcd-sustainability-good-business>.

in the field of mining and was a central advocate for the adoption of “social licensing to operate” mechanism: a process that ensures community engagement in mining operations but has few objective standards and is often taken up in lieu of stricter regulatory standards.²⁰⁷ The promulgation of frameworks of corporate self-regulation is also evident in WBSCD’s involvement in the forestry industry. In 1996, WBSCD member, Erling Lorentzen, owner of Aracruz Cellulose, a Brazilian paper manufacturing company, concerned with the criticisms about the deforestation and ecological degradation occurring as a result of the actions of forestry industry, created a project called the “Towards a Sustainable Paper Cycle,” that advocated recycling mechanisms and forestry certification in place of stricter regulations on logging.²⁰⁸

The councils’ objectives and influence, however, go beyond beyond the successful promotion of corporate self-regulation in environmental policy, and extend also to ideological understandings of sustainability, and environmental protection in general. In 1992, for example, the Business Council for Sustainable Development established the concept of “eco-efficiency” in their book *Changing Course*. Eco-efficiency, as articulated by the council, refers to the idea that economic growth and ecological wellbeing can be reconciled by increased attention to efficiency and technological development, and is described as the production of

competitively priced goods and services that satisfy human needs and bring quality of life while progressively reducing environmental impacts of goods and resource intensity throughout the entire life-cycle to a level at least in line with the Earth's estimated carrying capacity.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ John R. Owen and Deanna Kamp, “Social License and Mining: A Critical Perspective,” *Resources Policy* 38, no. 1 (2013): 29-35, p. 30.

²⁰⁸ Maryanne Grieg-Gran, “Following Up On “Towards a Sustainable Paper Cycle,”” *International Institute for Environment and Development* 2009, 1-20, p. 5.

²⁰⁹ Stephan Schmidheiny with BCSD, *Changing Course: A Global Perspective on Development and the Environment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

This approach, embedded in the ecomodern understanding that small adjustments, facilitated primarily through technological and market progress, can adequately achieve ecological health, is largely positioned as an alternative to more transformative change advocated by other environmental activists that suggest a larger overhaul in current economic and social institutions. In contrast, environmental protection, as advanced by the WBSCD does not have to sacrifice economic growth, or change significantly “business-as-usual.” Rather, ecological care can be internalized into the market, making profit seeking “work” for nature.

At the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio De Janeiro, in the same year as *Changing Course* was published, the Business Council for Sustainable Development was able to successfully include this vision of sustainability and “eco-efficiency” into the final version of Agenda 21, as the council “worked to ensure that Agenda 21 promoted voluntary self-regulation over other mechanisms to control the activities of TNC [transnational corporations].”²¹⁰ While attempts were made by other actors to impose more stringent regulations on larger corporations at the conference and to advance a more radical overhaul of the economic status quo, in particular by the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations (UNTNC) who outlined a series of regulations on corporate activity to be included into the working plan of Agenda 21, this was predominantly overridden by private interest groups and Western governments who worked to remove these suggestions and ultimately led to the UNCTC proposal dropped from the agenda.²¹¹

Specifically, Maurice Strong, the director general of the conference, asked the Business Council on Sustainable Development to outline recommendations on industry involvement in

²¹⁰ Jen Martens, “Corporate Influence on the Business and Human Rights Agenda of the United States,” Working Paper, *Global Policy Forum*, 2014: 1-38.

²¹¹ Ibid.

sustainable development. The end result was the promotion of sustainability as comprising of voluntary measures of corporate sustainability, the positioning of market actors and market frameworks as defining characteristics, and the manifestation of eco-efficiency as a core feature of sustainable development—reflected clearly in the final version of Agenda 21:

(...) leaders in business and industry, including transnational corporations, are increasingly taking voluntary initiatives, promoting and implementing self-regulations and greater responsibilities in ensuring their activities have minimal impacts on human health and the environment. (...) A positive contribution of business and industry, including transnational corporations, to sustainable development can increasingly be achieved by using economic instruments such as free market mechanisms (...).²¹²

The successful incorporation of eco-efficiency by the council into mainstream environmental conferences was also witnessed at the 2012 Earth summit as the WBSCD was active in establishing and promoting the concept of the Green Economy, an ecomodern framework promoting market mechanisms such as payments for ecosystems services (incentivizing the protection of “services”), biodiversity offsetting (where companies can exploit one area as long as another area is they make up for it somewhere else), ecotourism, and carbon markets as solutions to current ecological crises. Like eco-efficiency, the Green Economy initiative holds the basic assumption that nature protection must be imbued with profit potential for it to be effective, and that contemporary economies have the capacity to divorce, or decouple, economic growth and prosperity from environmental degradation through increased “efficiency” and technological innovation. Because of the necessary links between profit and ecological protection in the approach of the Green Economy, it complements an increase in market liberalism and a reduction of state regulations to the private sector. Indeed, one of the core

²¹² Quoted in *ibid.* p. 8

beliefs of the Green Economy approach is that free market frameworks are *more* conducive to ecological protection than those rooted in strict market regulation.

In addition to other groups, the WBSCD was involved in both the planning and implementation of Green Economy frameworks and was a member of the “Green Economy Coalition,” established by the United Nations in the run up to the 2012 conference.²¹³ In 2011, the Coalition published its “Road to Rio,” submission, which advocated a “recapitalisation of our natural resource base” to “incentivize investment.”²¹⁴ These recommendations ultimately formed the “master narrative” of the UNCED conference the following year and currently enjoy a central position in mainstream environmental governance.²¹⁵ The WBSCD is also a founding member of the 2016 Natural Capital Protocol, created in partnership between the council, the Nature Conservancy, World Bank, IUCN, and Conservation International, and which promotes the use of standardized and voluntary Green Economy frameworks to help businesses “measure and value natural capital . . . and to benefit from understand their relationship with nature.”²¹⁶ Indeed, as stated by Robert Fletcher, the concept of decoupling—the framework of divorcing ecological health from economic growth, and what is described as the “heart of the Green Economy” initiative—is a direct descendent of the WBSCD’s version of eco-efficiency established in 1992 and promoted by the council since.²¹⁷

²¹³ James Goodman and Ariel Salleh, “The Green Economy: Class Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony,” *Globalizations* 10, no. 3 (2013): 411-424.

²¹⁴ Green Economy Coalition, *The Road to Rio* (London: IIED, 2011), p. 7.

²¹⁵ Kenneth Iain MacDonald, “Grabbing ‘Green:’ Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and the Production of the Green Economy.”

²¹⁶ See <http://naturalcapitalcoalition.org/natural-capital-protocol-launched/>

²¹⁷ Robert Fletcher and Crelis Rammelt, “Decoupling: A Key Fantasy of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda,” *Globalizations* 14, no. 3 (2017): 450-467.

The council, then, has been tremendously influential in establishing and supporting normative approaches that are rooted in understandings of sustainability and environmental protection that extend beyond traditional dichotomies of business and the environment and are rooted in optimism about “win-win” solutions to ecological degradation.²¹⁸ As stated by Giorel Curran, the WBSCD has been “highly successful in injecting corporate business to the center of environmental governance through the globe.”²¹⁹ Sustainability, for WBSDC, does not entail a shift in values nor a change in economic or social institutions. Rather, it is very much “business-as-usual,” as economic growth can be made complement ecological health by advancing “smart” economics and technological fixes. Thus, the previous hostilities between ecological goals and economic growth, as reflected by earlier notions of “limits to growth,” are overcome by a conceptual marriage between profit-seeking and ecological well-being.

Arguably, the idea of decoupling and the broader approach of the council now represent the dominant framework of environmental governance, as market-based, ecomodern frameworks of environmental care, such as the Green Economy, “new” environmentalism and “new” conservation, are rapidly growing in popularity.²²⁰ These approaches are rooted in notions of a reflexive capitalism that can internalize ecological care and spearhead ecological protection and all maintain an emphasis on the primacy of market actors and market mechanism of environmental governance. Currently, these approaches are not only supported by private sector groups but are advocated by many public actors in environmental governance. Mainstream conferences, such as UNCED, largely promote the necessity of market actors and market

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Giorel Curran, *Sustainability and Energy Politics: Ecological Modernization and Corporate Social Responsibility* (Palgrave Macmillan: UK, 2015), p. 45.

²²⁰ Kenneth Iain MacDonald, “Grabbing ‘Green’: Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and the Production of the Green Economy.”

mechanisms in environmental protection and espouse the profit potential of “nature-saving.” This is also witnessed in many environmental and conservation NGOs—as Brockington and Duffy write, environmental organizations are “increasingly representing themselves as locales in which the historic opposites of private interest and environmental well-being—of profit incentive and environmental good—might be reconciled.”²²¹

Gramsci and Hegemony: A Theoretical Framework

The WBSCSD, then, represents a prominent actor in the field of environmental governance, supporting and constructing ecomodern approaches to environmental policies. From this perspective, private sector engagement, such as that practiced by the WBSCD, may represent more than pragmatism on the part of the partnering organizations, or greenwashing on the part of the private sector, but also, and more crucially, the “increasing penetration and influence of large corporations in the public-policy process.”²²² Through partnerships and *laisons* with NGOs and governmental groups, ecomodern approaches such as the Green Economy, and anthropocentric, economic-based understandings of sustainable are supported, reproduced and constructed.

While it may be understandable that private sector groups, such as the WBSCD, are key agent that influences environmental policy, some critics are wary, presenting such engagements as a “colonization of the sustainable development agenda rather than its promotion.”²²³ In his assessment of the outcomes of the World Strategy on Sustainable Development, von Frantzius argues that the partnerships approach strongly promoted by business during the summit was

²²¹ Brockington and Duffy, *Capitalism and Conservation*, p. 45.

²²² Peter Utting, “Corporate Responsibility and the Movement of Business,” *Development in Practice* 15, no. 3 and 4 (2005): 375-388, p. 386.

²²³ *Ibid.*

“feared by civil society to lead to undue influence of the business sector in drafting the latest global blueprint for global sustainable development.”²²⁴ Further, he states that an over focus on the establishment of partnerships with the private sector in general may result in the “privatization of sustainable development.”²²⁵ George Holmes makes this point also, claiming that private sector engagement in environmentalism through sponsorship and other philanthropic activity can lead to the construction of corporate-friendly environmentalisms through a convergence of elite interests and players in the domain of environmentalism that support and construct “private versions of the public good,” as well as through a normalization process of capitalist enterprise and private forms of wealth distribution.²²⁶

The practice of elite actors engaging in social movements and other parts of civil society to promote capitalist interests, and the idea that philanthropic activity produces and reproduces the status quo, is discussed by many scholars, and is particularly embedded in Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony.²²⁷ For Gramsci, hegemony is formed from the distinction between coercion and consent. While coercion refers to power that is enforced through violence or threat of violence, consent is hegemonic power, i.e., authority that is accepted *voluntarily* through a submission to ideological norms. Hegemonic power works to “convince social classes to subscribe to the social values and norms” of dominant groups and it is a mechanism of power that relies on voluntary participation rather than the fear of individual physical violence.²²⁸ It

²²⁴ Ina Von Frantzius, “World Summit on Sustainable Development Johannesburg 2002: A Critical Analysis and Assessment of the Outcomes,” *Environmental Politics* 13, no. 2 (2004): 467-473.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Holmes, “Biodiversity for Billionaires: Capitalism, Conservation, and the Role of Philanthropy in Selling/Saving Nature.”

²²⁷ See Joan Roelofs, *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* (New York: Suny Press, 2003).

²²⁸ Mark C. Stoddart, “Ideology, Hegemony, Discourse: A Critical Review of Theories of Knowledge and Power,” *Social Thought & Research* 28 (2007): 191-225.

creates a discourse of common sense that, according to Gramsci, is adopted and perceived as normal, ultimately leading to a kind of “moral and political passivity.” As Gramsci defines it, common sense is

The conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed. Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the “folklore” of philosophy, and like, folklore, it takes countless forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent, and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy is.²²⁹

While coercive power is usually in the realm of the state and specifically, in military and police forces, the reproduction of hegemonic power through common sense lies in civil society: the media, the Church, school, family, etc. Unlike in Hegelian accounts that understands civil society as acting as a barrier against market dominance, for Gramsci, civil society is the arena where the state and market produces and reproduces hegemony, a social order where "a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behavior."²³⁰ Thus, dominant institutions and institutional actors influence human actions and thought in order to produce and reproduce certain hegemonic imaginaries and realities. As David Neusteurer writes, the “strength of hegemonic forces is their ability to penetrate society on a structural level and their presence in main societal areas such as economy, culture, gender, and class.”²³¹ Through a participation in social activities and other

²²⁹ Gramsci, *The Prison Diaries*, p. 333.

²³⁰ Joseph Fernia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 24.

²³¹ David Neusteurer, “The Concept of Green Economy and its Role in Hegemonic Neoliberal Capitalism,” *Soc. ekol Zagreb* 25, no. 3 (2016): 311-324, p. 314.

aspects of civil society, the dominant classes, therefore, can “lead the society in certain directions.”²³²

For Gramsci, hegemonic power is the most common means in which power is made manifest, with coercive domination and physical violence as a means of consent remaining mostly an exception in Western capitalist societies. By the promulgation of universal norms, embodied and supported by specific international institutions and actors, consent is actively manufactured on a normative level. For Gramsci, philanthropy and seemingly “benevolent actions” of elite, capitalist classes, are a major vehicle of this kind of coercive domination. Gramsci maintains, for example, that philanthropy aids capitalist hegemony by granting a veil of moral superiority to dominant classes by virtue of their apparent generosity, and by normalizing and diverting attention from unequal concentrations of wealth inherent to capitalist enterprise. In an article written in December, 1917, entitled “Philanthropy, Good Will and Organization,” Gramsci criticizes the idea that “true liberty for the many can develop as a result of concessions by those in power,” and maintains instead that only through solidarity and community can oppression be ultimately lessened.²³³

This hegemony of philanthropy and other capitalist benevolence is reflected most apparently in Gramsci’s formulation of “passive revolution.” According to Gramsci, passive revolutions refers to situations when “counter-hegemonic challenges to the dominant capitalist order are co-opted and neutralized through changes and concessions which re-establish the consent in that order.”²³⁴ This neutralization, what Gramsci calls “the absorption of the

²³² Joseph A. Buttigieg, “The Contemporary Discourse on Civil Society: A Gramscian Critique” *Boundary 2*, no. 32 (2005): 33-52. p. 44

²³³ Dante Germino, Antonio Gramsci, *Architect of a New Politics* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

²³⁴ Wanner, “The New ‘Passive Revolution’ of the Green Economy and Growth Discourse,” p. 23.

antithesis,” works by realizing small incremental reform in place of larger structural change. Passive revolutions are, thus, “revolutions without a revolution,” or “revolutions from above,” that are established by the dominant class and occur with the intent of control, rather than liberation. Because of the emphasis on control, these kind of dominant actions are more accurately referred to as restorations, therefore, where elite groups attempt to restore consent by granting concessions and making promises on behalf of subordinate interests. According to Gramsci and neo-Gramscian scholars, philanthropy and corporate social responsibility frameworks conform to such restoration attempts. For Žizek, for example, philanthropy, and redistribution of wealth to social causes, occurs as a means to avoid revolution by masking the malevolence of capitalist action and associating profit-making with generosity in a broader sense.²³⁵ In practice, therefore, the generosity and care promulgated by dominant actors under the framework of philanthropy and social responsibility is often superficial. Indeed, in a recent study of a French children clothing retailer that developed CSR practices in direct reaction to criticisms of poor labor condition and child exploitation, the authors found that the companies response was to engage in philanthropic activities and CSR initiatives, such as the publishing sustainability reports, while the “core business model based on exploitative low-cost country sourcing remain[ed] intact.”²³⁶ Similar criticisms have been made in relation to the CSR practices of other companies, such as Exxon, Coca Cola, etc.²³⁷

²³⁵ Žizek, *Violence: Six Sideways Glances*.

²³⁶ Arno Kouroula and Gullarme Delalieux, “The Micro-level Foundations and Dynamics of Political Corporate Social Responsibility: Hegemony and Passive Revolution through Civil Society,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 135, no. 4 (2016): 769-785.

²³⁷ See Jamie Henn, “ExxonMobil Takes the Olympic Gold in Deceitful Advertising,” 11 August, 2016, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/08/11/exxonmobil-takes-olympic-gold-deceitful-advertising>; Amit Srivastava, “Never Mind the Greenwash—Coca Cola Can Never be Water Neutral,” 15 August, 2016, <https://theecologist.org/2015/aug/25/never-mind-greenwash-coca-cola-can-never-be-water-neutral>.

The WBSCD and Hegemonic Environmentalism

Gramscian theory represents a critical framework to analyze hegemonic structures, such as those of neoliberal capitalism. In contemporary understandings of Gramscian hegemony, neoliberal capitalism is rooted in consensual agreements that are both “ensured by international institutions and enlarged through a passive revolution on an international scale.”²³⁸ Analyzing the actions of WBSCD, a group embedded in the norms of neoliberalism and comprised of some of the most powerful and dominant corporate actors in the world, from the perspective of a critical Gramscian approach, is important, then, to understand the various ideological struggles and power relations inherent to environmental discourses and embedded in private sector engagement in environmentalism. Analyses of this kind are especially crucial given the urgent nature of ecological issues and the necessity of effective solutions to increasing environmental and social degradation.

Some way in which the engagement of WBSCD in the realm of environmental politics may support and conform to hegemonic action in the Gramscian sense are as follows. First, as discussed above, the environmental policies and ideologies supported and produced by the council prioritize the economic above all else and ensure that profit creation is not challenged by environmental policies or other environmental ideologies. The focus on win-win solutions, central to the council’s ideology, and the primacy of the norm of eco-efficiency, demonstrates the emphasis placed on the maintenance of economic growth, reflected also in WBSCD’s own definition of sustainability—“the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable *economic*

²³⁸ Neusteurer, “The Concept of Green Economy and its Role in Hegemonic Neoliberal Capitalism,” p. 314.

development.”²³⁹ The later framework of the Green Economy supported by the WBSCD extends this commitment to capitalist enterprise even further by asserting that the basic tenets of neoliberal ideologies—profit creation, the “wealth optimizing” individual, and competition—are not only compatible with ecological health, but *central* to it—we *must* sell nature to save it! In this sense, then, Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony, that concessions granted to counter-hegemonic pressure much not interfere with economic growth or the broader logic of capitalism, is congruent with the work of the council, who, aware that the “transnational corporate enterprise must be coupled with consensus over environmental regulation,” does so in a manner that does not “touch the essential nucleus of economic relations.”²⁴⁰

Second, the market-based environmentalism proposed by the council is appealing to many actors. Companies and investors are likely to accept it as it ensures consistent economic growth and involves the creation of new environmental commodities for investment; labor unions support the promise of new jobs associated with increased economic development; and “developing” countries are likely to find it favorable due to the potential it allows for them to continue with their current economic growth.²⁴¹ Thus, as the policies supported by the council do not necessitate a radical alteration of people’s behavior and lifestyles, and because they conform to normative frameworks of economic progress embedded in the dominant neoliberal imaginary, they sit squarely in the realm of the hegemonic, ultimately leading to the advantage of the dominant classes as understood by Gramsci. Further, the council itself embodies the current hegemonic order on an institutional level. It is comprised of some of the most powerful corporations in the world, including Monsanto, Shell, and Hewlett Packard, from some of the

²³⁹ See <http://www.wbcd.org/Overview/About-us>.

²⁴⁰ Carroll, *Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in a Global Field*,” p. 40.

²⁴¹ Neusteurer, “The Concept of Green Economy and its Role in Hegemonic Neoliberal Capitalism.”

most exploitative industries. Its members have a combined revenue of over eight trillion dollars, much more than any operating environmental group (or most of the leading environmental organizations combined), and more than the GDP of any nation, with the exception of the U.S and China.²⁴²

Finally, the council's work conforms to ideas of passive revolution in its relation to the rhetoric of corporate social responsibility. Although the organization is primarily a lobbying group, for example, and has worked extensively in the past to ensure "business friendly" environmental policy and ideologies, its official claim is that it is operating on the principles of benevolent corporate social responsibility, and that it exists to "accelerate the tradition to a sustainable world by making more sustainable businesses more successful."²⁴³ The council publishes CSR reports and holds CSR conferences, such as the "Responsible Business Forum," and is generally perceived as a "leader" in the CSR field. Despite the CSR approach of the organization, however, the actions of the member corporations are exceedingly contradictory to these assertions, with many members actively breaking legal and moral codes with regard ecological and social behavior.²⁴⁴ From the perspective of a passive revolution, then, the strategic use of CSR frameworks, and the associations of benevolence that accompany it, serve to increase corporate power and maintain capitalist hegemony by detracting from the corporation's daily activities and exploitative business frameworks, allowing a "moral leverage" of sorts that legitimizes corporate influence in policy and legal frameworks, and appeases protestors by making small concessions that ultimately do not compromise broader economic growth.

²⁴² See <http://www.wbcsd.org/Overview/About-us>.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ For one example see Vandana Shiva, "The Seeds Of Suicide: How Monsanto Destroys Farming," *Global Research*, 23 July, 2013, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-seeds-of-suicide-how-monsanto-destroys-farming/5329947>.

According to Gramsci, such influence, when it is exerted on civil society institutions and groups, can lead to the absorption and marginalization of “counter-hegemonic” imaginaries that espouse more radical change, and the promotion of incremental, capitalist-friendly, visions in their place.²⁴⁵ The rise of ecomodern strategies in recent times, correlating with the rise in private sector actors in the domain of environmental governance, may be one indication of this.

The consequences, therefore, of such private sector engagement in mainstream environmentalism is significant. Unlike most accounts that see engagement of this kind as problematic largely because of its potential to be deceptive, the nature of hegemonic interference, such as that practiced by WBSCD and other private sector groups and actions, has a distinct normative character and can lead to a reshaping and reframing of the ideological context of mainstream environmentalism. Indeed, the WBSCD refers to itself as a “thought-leader” in the field of sustainability, and regularly publishes “visions” of the future. These documents, with one example being the WBSCD’s “Vision 2050,” advocates ecomodern, market-centered, strategies and norms of environmental and social well-being and are exceedingly influential in both the private sector and beyond.²⁴⁶

In a Gramscian sense, then, groups such as the WBSCD, by engagement and purposeful normative influence in arenas like environmental governance, may be active in what he refers to as the “war of position.” Gramsci used the term “war of position” in contrast with the “war of maneuver.” While a war of maneuver refers to physical rebellion and conflict between dominant and oppressed classes, the war of position, is a more gradual and subtle conflict, when forces in power attempt to gain influence and power in order to maintain hegemonic control. Ultimately,

²⁴⁵ Gramsci, “The Prison Diaries.”

²⁴⁶ World Business Council for Sustainable Development, “Vision 2050,” 2 April, 2010, file:///C:/Users/nw0081/Downloads/Vision2050-FullReport%20(2).pdf.

in a war of position then, the dominant group seeks to enforce and reinforce the dominant class's vision of the world, and the understandings of common sense as central to the maintenance of the rulings classes' power.

The use of the noun "war" is demonstrative of the Gramscian emphasis on ideological struggle, and reflects Gramsci's departure from the understanding of ideology as put forth by Marx. Unlike Marx who sees ideology as akin to all-encompassing super structure that cannot be penetrated, Gramsci understands hegemonic power as reproduced in a dialectic relationship with counter-hegemonic contestation—"hegemony and counter-hegemony exist in a state of tension; each gives shape to the other."²⁴⁷ For the dominant classes, the primary objective is to conserve a degree of ideological unity in which to maintain the consent of the dominated classes. For the subaltern groups, however, the focus is on resisting the ideological domination of the ruling class through a deconstruction of common sense and the creation of an alternative vision of social life. Indeed, the actions and rhetoric of WBCSD reflect this ideological struggle as the council advertises its membership by promoting by "significant influence" over environmental policy that the corporations can glean from their engagement in the council. Further, as William Carroll points out, the establishment of the council was ultimately reactive in the first instance as the private sector began acknowledge the potential threat of the "counter-hegemonic" aspects, or oppositional potential, of environmentalism. As Carroll writes

[T]he WBCSD reflects a maturing elite awareness that transnational corporate enterprise must be coupled with consensus over environmental regulation. What makes the WBCSD unique in the global policy field are its efforts to surpass the prevailing dualism of "business versus the environment." It presents a comprehensive vision of capitalist social and moral progress – anchored by its central axiom of "eco-efficiency." Within this retooled version of sustainable development, business, governments and environmental activists make concessions around a general interest in sustaining both the health of nature and the "health" of the global economy. In this way, Gramsci's formula for ruling

²⁴⁷ Stoddart, "Ideology, Hegemony, Discourse: A Critical Review of Theories of Knowledge and Power," p. 202.

class hegemony – that concessions granted in organizing consent must not touch the essential nucleus of economic relations – is satisfied.²⁴⁸

Using a Gramscian analysis, then, points to the potential of domination at the core of contemporary corporate engagement in environmentalism. The normative influence of the council, and the broader “privatization of environmentalism” that accompanies it, may reflect a serious conflict of interest in environmental politics. Indeed, the kind of sustainable development that a natural gas company supports may be substantially different from the version advocated for by a community member living in the area the company operates. Under the current framework, however, which allows almost unlimited “engagement” in environmentalism from private sector actors, with very little accountability, the gas company, with its significantly larger resources, has a distinct advantage in getting their version set in place. Taken on a larger scale, the influence of the private sector may lead to marginalization of other kinds of environmental ideologies, or in Gramscian terms, an “absorption of the antithesis” where dominant, common sense imaginaries suppress counter-hegemonic responses to ecological degradation.

Conclusion

As the activities of the WBSCD suggest, growing private sector engagement in the domain of environmentalism, upheld by frameworks of corporate social responsibility, stewardship, and philanthropy, can have consequences beyond the dominant understandings of engagement as either pragmatic on the part of the environmental movement, or greenwashing on the part of the company. Groups such as the WBSCD reflect the capacity of private sector actors to support, construct, and produce certain kinds of environmentalisms and visions of ecological

²⁴⁸ Carroll, “Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in a Global Field.”

protection that conform, broadly speaking, to private sector interests. The next chapter continues with this line of inquiry and analyzes the representations of nature that emerge from corporate engagements of this kind, focusing, in particular, on private-public partnerships in the context of conservation organizations.

CHAPTER 5

WHAT “NATURE” IS SPEAKING:” REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE IN PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND THE GREEN ECONOMY

It is now somewhat of a truism to say that environmentalism is neoliberalizing.²⁴⁹ The convergence of environmentalism and neoliberalism is represented by processes such as payments for ecosystem services, biodiversity offsetting and ecotourism, and facilitated through mechanisms such as carbon markets, species and wetlands banking, and social media.²⁵⁰ Scholars point out that the neo-liberalizing of environmentalism not only affects processes of environmental governance, but also representations of nature itself, as nature becomes redefined to aid accumulation; as an entity that can “pay for its own reproduction.”²⁵¹

The neoliberal “turn” in environmental protection is facilitated by the convergence of neoliberal actors in the domain of environmental governance.²⁵² As public funding to environmental projects and conservation decreases, environmental groups turn to the private sector for funding, resources, and techniques, resulting in “market forces [finding] their way into conservation policy and practice to a degree unimaginable only a decade ago.”²⁵³ George Holmes maintains that private sector engagement is neoliberalizing conservation and environmental practices as corporate actors become influential in the domain of environmental politics under the auspices of public-private partnerships and ecophilanthropy, simultaneously legitimizing

²⁴⁹ See Kenneth MacDonald, “The Devil is in the Biodiversity: Neoliberalism and the Restructuring of Biodiversity Conservation,” *Antipode* 42, no. 3 (2010): 513-550

²⁵⁰ Robert Fletcher, Wolfram Dressler and Bram Büscher, “Nature™ Inc.: Nature as Neoliberal Capitalist Imaginary,” in Raymond L. Bryant, *International Handbook of Political ecology* (London: Elgar, 2015), pp. 359-372.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

capitalist frameworks and reproducing “private visions of the public good” (including the “ecological good”).²⁵⁴ Indeed, the influx of corporate actors into the field of environmentalism is such that, as MacDonald argues, it is leading to “increasingly fluid boundaries between ‘private’ and pseudo public-actors like non-governmental organizations, even as those actors continue to invoke a rhetoric of differentiation between business, government, and NGOs.”²⁵⁵

The complex ways, however, in which nature is being reconfigured and reimagined in the context of these broader market forces remains underexplored. In this chapter, I focus on one example in a recent Conservation International project, “Nature Is Speaking,” in order to analyze the kinds of “nature” being produced and reproduced under contemporary public-private partnerships and in service of novel environmental agendas.

I chose the “Nature Is Speaking” campaign for a couple of reasons. First, Conservation International is one the most powerful environmental organization in the world, with hundreds of corporate sponsors, including some of the world largest corporations. In 2016, it had revenue of \$212 million, of which over fifty percent came from the private sector (sixteen percent from corporations and thirty four percent from foundations).²⁵⁶ The organization has private sector affiliations high up in the organization, with Rob Walton of Walmart serving as chairman of the executive committee and many other corporate actors serving as board members. In addition to the corporate connections of the organization itself, the project, “Nature is Speaking,” is, in some respects, a public-private conglomeration with corporations such as Hewlett Packard, Coca Cola,

²⁵⁴ Holmes, “Biodiversity for Billionaires.”

²⁵⁵ Kenneth MacDonald, Grabbing ‘Green:’ Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and The Production of the Green Economy,” p. 48.

²⁵⁶ Conservation International, “Annual Report,” 2016, http://annualreport.conservation.org/?_ga=2.258293130.1836564816.1508950254-1851810068.1504444405&_gac=1.114950517.1505586110.CjwKCAjwI_PNBRBcEiwA4pplRaY2M7IKU2wMUUpSBbX5pc2S1nAH5GhLiGQ7bRdG8EAWUHCbQ5QABxoCFbgQAvD_BwE.

and Walmart listed as its key “partners.” Second, the organization, and the project, both represent and promulgate the framework of “new environmentalism,” a project that seeks to, as described by Conservation International director M. Sanjayan, “rebrand environmentalism” away from frameworks of intrinsic value and towards market-based techniques based on the instrumental valuation of nature; in short, to make nature profitable.²⁵⁷

The chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, I analyze the rise of market-based frameworks in environmentalism, with a particular focus on neoliberal environmentalism and the recent framework of the Green Economy. I maintain that “neoliberal environmentalism” points to both an increase of market techniques in “saving nature,” as well as a growth of market actors in the field of environmental governance. In section two, I focus on one public-private alliance in Conservation International’s “Nature Is Speaking” campaign in order to ascertain the kinds of nature envisioned and reproduced in these new forms of governance and in the service of “new” environmentalisms. In the final section, I conclude with some commentary on the possible consequences and contradictions with regard to the ongoing reconfiguration of nature and nature protection.

Neoliberalism and the Environment

In the last ten years or so, a plethora of scholarship has emerged examining the varying ways that neoliberalism and environmentalism are connected and connecting both in discourse and praxis. Neoliberalism, although neither a homogenous nor a unilateral force, is largely interpreted in a twofold manner. First, as an economic doctrine that calls for increasing

²⁵⁷ M. Sanjayan, “Environmentalism Gets a Much Needed Re-Brand,” *Conservation International*, 1 October, 2014, <https://blog.conservation.org/2014/10/environmentalism-gets-a-much-needed-rebrand/>.

deregulation of market transactions and privatization of property and institutions, and second, following from the work of Bram Buscher, Noel Castree, and others, a political ideology that attempts to “subject political, social, and ecological affairs to capitalist market dynamics.”²⁵⁸

Both of these aspects of neoliberalism play out in contemporary environmental governance, exemplified poignantly by new forms of environmental protection initiatives that rely predominantly on market mechanisms to ensure environmental protection. Frameworks such as payment for ecosystem services (NGOs or governments pay landowners for the protection of a natural process of species), bioprospecting, (fees paid by industry, usually pharmaceutical companies, for the rights to collect specimens of plants and animals), biodiversity offsetting (where companies can exploit one area as long as another area is they make up for it somewhere else), and eco-tourism, for example, all offer avenues in which nature can be monetized and internalized into the market economy. These initiatives give financial incentives for parts of nature to be protected and governed, leading to “win-win” scenarios where nature is being “saved,” without compromising economic growth. Embedded in this institutional transformation, therefore, is a reconfiguration of how nature protection should be carried out, with the underlying assumption being that nature can only be “protected” thorough its submission to capital, what Kathleen McAfee calls “selling nature to save it.”²⁵⁹

Financial mechanisms such as these that attempt to internalize the value of nature into general accounts are now referred to collectively as the “Green Economy,” and it is fast becoming one of the most significant frameworks in environmental governance. The Green

²⁵⁸ Bram Büscher, Sian Sullivan, Katja Neves, Jim Igoe, and Dan Brockington, “Towards a Synthesized Critique of Neoliberal Biodiversity Conservation,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 23, no. 2 (2012): 4-30., p. 6.

²⁵⁹ Kathleen MacAfee, “Selling Nature to Save It? Biodiversity and Green Developmentalism,” *Society and Space* 17, no. 2 (1999): 203-219.

Economy was a central feature at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio De Janeiro in 2012, and was referred to as the “master narrative” of the conference.²⁶⁰ In 2011, UNEP published a document called “Towards a Green Economy,” asserting that the Green Economy could “deliver improved human wellbeing and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.”²⁶¹ Other reports advocating transitions to the green economy were subsequently published by the World Bank and the European Union.²⁶²

One well-known example of the Green Economy in action is the REDD initiative — Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forests Degradation—that emerged in the United Nations climate negotiations held in Bali in 2007, but was first negotiated under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2005. This objective of the program is the reduction of greenhouse gases emission through forest management and financial incentives. Because studies suggest that changes to the land, such as industrial logging and forest destruction, account for up to twenty-nine percent of greenhouse gas emissions globally, the focus on responding to land use change became a major inclusion into the goals of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The REDD framework revolves around the reduction of deforestation and the related conservation of carbon sinks through financial incentives. In particular, a country will be financially rewarded if they can avoid projected rates of deforestation and forest degradation, or reduce current rate. The framework was originally

²⁶⁰ MacDonald, “Grabbing 'Green': Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and The Production Of 'The Green Economy,’” p. 47.

²⁶¹ UN Environment Programme, “Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication,” (Arendal, Norway: UNEP/GRID, 2011), www.unep.org/greeneconomy.

²⁶² MacDonald, “Grabbing 'Green': Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and The Production Of 'The Green Economy.’”

targeted at developing countries and currently there are over 120 countries involved in REDD, financed by public, private, bilateral and multilateral sources. In addition, at the 2016 Paris Climate Talks, negotiations began for a new carbon market to begin in 2020. Carbon markets would allow countries to earn REDD credits, and then choose to either keep them in to offset other emissions from fossil fuel and extractive industries in general, or sell them and trade with other countries who want to offset their own emissions.

The framework of REDD emerges from the concept of “ecosystem services,” popularized in contemporary literature by Gretchen Daily’s book *Nature’s Services: Societal Dependence on Natural Ecosystems*, and defined by the 2006 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment as “the benefits people obtain from ecosystems.”²⁶³ At the heart of the ecosystem approach is “natural capital:” the idea that nature provides vital benefits to human societies, and that these benefits can be monetized and subsequently recognized in national accounts. Like other ecomodern frameworks, advocates of the Green Economy and ecosystem service-based accounting maintain that internalizing what has traditionally been externalized in market economies will herald a revolution of sorts. “Nature,” once left out, will now be brought back in. This approach is summarized succinctly in a statement from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development in 2012:

A capitalist is somebody who optimizes returns from capital employed. The mistake is that the current economic model is solely focused on optimizing the return on financial capital. We need to add two more elements of capital: natural capital and social capital, and tell capitalists to go and optimize that.²⁶⁴

Neoliberal forms of environmentalism, then, represents a radically different response to

²⁶³Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis* (Island Press: Washington, D.C., 2005).

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Najam, “World Business Council for Sustainable Development: The Greening of Business of Greenwash,” p. 70.

other expressions of environmental care that generally seek to regulate corporate behavior and decrease capitalist accumulation. In contrast, neoliberal environmentalism, and ecological modernization discourses in general, understand ecological destruction as a result of bad accounting rather than structural flaws, and as such, advocate incremental reforms that tweak economic and social institutions in a more sustainable direction, largely encouraged by financial incentivization. Importantly, the assumption in these discourses is that environmental protection can be “win-win:” economic growth does not have to be sacrificed for ecological protection, and nature protection can be a profitable affair.

In addition, not only are environmental frameworks of protection altered in the reconfiguration of environmental governance, but so too are representations of nature itself, as nature becomes enlisted in a broader project of capitalist accumulation.²⁶⁵ In selling nature to save it, nature must be (re)defined as a commodity, as an entity that can “pay for its own reproduction.”²⁶⁶ This redefinition is achieved largely through an emphasis on natural “services,” i.e., the value it provides people, as well as a heightened focus on the commodification and marketization of nature. Nature, therefore, in neoliberal accounts, must be nature that capital can “see,” in short, a nature that can be traded for capital either through a financialization of its “services” or through processes of direct consumption.

The influx of neoliberal methods and ideologies in environmentalism, represented by the Green Economy and other versions of heightened neoliberal environmental strategies, are reinforced and perpetuated by the simultaneous rise in private sector actors in the domain of environmental governance. As discussed in the previous chapter, groups like the WBSCD have

²⁶⁵ MacDonald, “Grabbing “Green:” Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and The Production Of “The “Green Economy,”” p. 49.

²⁶⁶ Fletcher, Dressler and Büscher, “Nature™ Inc.: Nature As Neoliberal Capitalist Imaginary.”

had major influence in the development of Green Economy, as well as on the ideological frameworks that underline these novel mechanisms of environmental policy, such as the ideas of eco-efficiency and decoupling. A recent report by Friends of the Earth further outlines in detail the close links between the United Nations and the private sector in the development of the Green Economy,²⁶⁷ and other scholars, such as Robert Sklair, have noted that instrumental, market-friendly, frameworks of sustainable development have emerged as a result of a convergence of “transnational capitalist class” in environmental governance, what he referred to as a Gramscian historic bloc.²⁶⁸

Indeed, as Holmes maintains, the neoliberalization of environmentalism refers both to the rise of market mechanism and market actors in environmentalism, as environmental organizations develop closer relationships to the private sector through philanthropic engagements and public-private partnerships. As he puts it:

Leading NGOs have developed closer relationships with corporations, working with them, and copying their methods in areas such as marketing, taking their donations, and generally developing more positive attitudes about their activities.²⁶⁹

This is further discussed by Brockington and Duffy who state that, through increased partnerships with the private sector, environmental groups are “increasingly representing themselves as locale in which the historical opposites private interest and environmental well-being-of profit incentive and environmental good, may be reconciled.”²⁷⁰ In many cases, then, the extent of private sector engagement in environmentalism goes beyond narratives of

²⁶⁷ Friends of the Earth International, “Reclaim the UN from Corporate Capture,” 19 June, 2012, <http://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Reclaim-the-UN.pdf>, p. 5.

²⁶⁸ Leslie Sklair, “The Transnational Capitalist Class and the Discourse of Globalization,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 14, 1 (2000): 67-85.

²⁶⁹ George Holmes, “Biodiversity for Billionaires,” p. 319.

²⁷⁰ Brockington and Duffy, *Capitalism and Conservation*.

infiltration or “selling out,” but rather involves a broader reconfiguration of the traditional boundaries of the public and private sector. As corporations increasingly adopt the discourse of sustainability, public NGOs, in turn, become more business-like and corporate in their structure and methods, pursuing environmental strategies that are compatible with private interests, gaining large swaths of funding from the private sector, and appointing corporate leaders in positions of significant power in public environmental groups. This reconfiguration has allowed for the domination of market-based strategies such as the Green Economy and sustainable development in environmental governance resulting from a convergence of dominant, neoliberal, actors in the domain of environmental politics and the subsequent privileging of economic over ecological epistemologies.

The following section, then, examines if, and how, the discourse of the Green Economy, and the representations of nature that are embedded in it, are produced and reproduced by prominent environmental organizations and their projects. Choosing an environmental group that reflects the growing embeddedness of the private sector from the perspective of both funding and organizational leadership, I investigate the representations of the natural environment that are supported and produced in these institutional contexts, and how they conform, or do not conform, to broader projects of neoliberal environmentalism, such as the Green Economy.

Nature is Speaking: A Closer Look

I selected the campaign “Nature Is Speaking” to investigate these links—between neoliberal environmentalisms, neoliberal environments, and the growth of neoliberal actors in environmentalism—for two predominant reasons. First, this campaign, and organization, Conservation International, represents the epitome of boundary fluidity in non-governmental

organization-private sector relations. Conservation International, one of the largest conservation organization in the world, has hundreds of corporate sponsors, including some of the largest in the world, such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron, Monsanto, Coca Cola, Nestle, Starbucks, and Shell. In 2016, it has a revenue of annual \$212 million, of which sixteen percent came from corporations, and thirty four percent from foundations. The organization has private sector affiliated people high up in the central organization, with Rob Walton of Walmart serving as chairman of the executive committee and many of other corporate actors, such as Web Bush, CEO of Northrop Grumman, and Robert J. Fischer, chairman of GAP, serving as board members.

The campaign itself, “Nature Is Speaking,” is similarly connected to the private sector. Although it not revealed who funds the project, what is apparent is that is has social media partners in Walmart and Coca-Cola, with Walmart hosting the campaign videos on its official website. In addition, Hewlett Packard donates one dollar to Conservation International for every hashtag use of “Nature Is Speaking” on social media platforms and has donated HP Explore technology to monitor the social media impact of the series, and oversee the types of conversation being generated about it. In addition to partnership, the series is directed by Lee Clow, the creator of Apple’s infamous *1984* and *Think Different* Campaigns, as well as campaigns for other companies, including Nissan and Taco Bell. The hiring of a famous “ad man” was purposeful on the part of Conservation International. As Sanjayan writes, “[the campaign] takes a page from smart brands like Apple or Virgin Airlines, who have changed not just the perception of a particular product but the conservation around an entire segment of life, and in the process created brands we simply want to be around.”²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Sanjayan, “Conservation Gets a Much Needed Re-Brand.”

Likewise, the series, “Nature Is Speaking,” is a high intensity campaign, with a similar goal of changing the conversation about environmentalism. Consisting of a series of ten approximately four minute videos, it features a host of Hollywood celebrities personifying different natural entities, such as air, water, flowers, redwoods, over the backdrop of vast landscapes.²⁷² The voice of the natural entities personified has a scornful tone, disparaging against human-caused destruction of the natural environment. Harrison Ford, as the ocean, asks: “I am the ocean, who you think you are?” Kevin Spacey, personifying air, snidely reveals that he would like people to make air, like him. The redwood, via Robert Redford asks, “I’ve seen just about everything. You don’t impress me.” Julia Roberts, as Mother Nature, quips: “My planet, my atmosphere, my rules. Any questions?”²⁷³ Aside from nature’s disdainful tones, each video emphasizes the various utilities that the particular natural element provides humans; redwoods provide wood, the coral reefs provide protein to people, oceans regulate temperature, etc. To make that message even clearer, each segment ends with the words “People Need Nature” sprawling in large letters across a black screen.

The message in the videos, therefore, is pretty clear. Nature is not in need of human protection, but rather humans need nature. It is not a vulnerable, fragile, or even benevolent force. Instead, it is strong and formidable, apathetic to human concerns, and it is in our enlightened self-interest to protect it for ourselves, but not for its sake (as is repeatedly stated, nature doesn’t need people). This perception of nature conforms to the stated objective of Conservation International to “rebrand environmentalism.” Sanjayan states, for example, “we need to reframe the debate the change the conversation—in other words, the environmental

²⁷² Conservation International, “Nature is Speaking,” October 25, 2017, <https://www.conservation.org/nature-is-speaking/Pages/default.aspx>.

²⁷³ Ibid.

movement needs a rebrand. And that's exactly what Conservation International is doing with our "Nature Is Speaking" campaign."²⁷⁴ This "rebrand" has the goal of reconfiguring the relationship of nature to one that emphasizes the necessity of natural entities, rather than their intrinsic worth. He explains: "I have become frustrated with the view of nature as a fragile painting: a Sistine Chapel dripping with life, to be admired from afar and described in reverent tones."²⁷⁵ Although recognizing that some people may relate to that idea, what is more critical, he asserts, is to focus on all the ways that nature serves people, its instrumental worth. Thus, he states, "today our mission is based around the ethos that people needs nature to thrive—and we work on that part of nature that humans needs most."²⁷⁶

The newly branded environmentalism, therefore, is a people-focused one. Notably absent are the moral appeals to the intrinsic value of nature, or even the aesthetic and spiritual virtues of wild places; now, what is emphasized is strict instrumentality. As Sanjayan repeats, "love is not enough, we have got to emphasize that we need this place."²⁷⁷ On the "about" section on the campaign webpage, the broader project is described as "our humanifesto," with the objectives falling in line with other aspects of "new conservation," a recent framework in conservation that emphasizes a human-focused conservation, market based frameworks like ecosystem services, business-NGO partnerships, and a focus on novel ecosystems, such as urban and agricultural areas.

Despite the people-centered emphasis in the series, however, the images of nature shown in the videos are themselves almost completely devoid of people. There are vast expanses of

²⁷⁴ Sanjayan, "Conservation Gets a Much Needed Re-Brand."

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

seemingly pristine natural areas, tumbling waterfalls, giant uninhabited forests, barren mountain peaks, and delicate flowers in wild meadows. Nowhere to be seen is industrial activity, urban structures, or any signs of human labor or inhabitation. Despite the assertion in the videos that nature serves as a critical utility service for humans, this can be understood only indirectly from the images themselves, with actual human interaction with nature seemingly taking place elsewhere.

The apparent incoherence between the message of the video and how nature is actually represented may be more intelligible upon further analysis, however. There is much research, for example, on the construction of nature as spectacle and the reformulation of nature as a site of consumption and capitalist accumulation. Critics of the concept of wilderness argue that ideas of vast wilderness spaces that are devoid of humanity in the establishment of the first national parks, where the natural spaces in question were represented as “spectacular object[s] rather than as inhabitable space[s],” led to the displacement of large amounts of indigenous peoples to create sites of consumption for tourists.²⁷⁸ Much work has been done on this in the context of Africa, where European fantasies of wild, pristine nature were—and are —transposed onto African lands for the purposes of consumption and enjoyment (mostly by Europeans), often to the detriment of the people living there.²⁷⁹ Although eco-tourism is not what is being directly promoted here, a similar process of commodification is occurring as nature is being reconfigured into a product for consumption through the continued emphasis on its essential attributes for human survival. This commodification is reflected mainly in the video through the use of aesthetically appealing

²⁷⁸ Jim Igoe, “The Spectacle Of Nature In The Global Economy Of Appearances: Anthropological Engagements With The Spectacular Mediations Of Transnational Conservation,” *Critique of Anthropology* 30, no. 4 (2010): 375–397, p. 378.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

imagery and the type of language used. Ian Somerhalder, for example, personifying coral reefs, describes the reefs as a “protein factory,” while Kevin Spacey, as the rainforest, describes himself as a “medicine cabinet.”²⁸⁰ This kind of instrumental language is also reflected in other Conservation International campaigns. In a 2008 appeal for the organization, for example, George Meyer, writer for *The Simpsons*, describes the natural world as a “giant utility that cleans our water and regulates our temperature,” and Prince Charles cautioned against more ecological destruction by stating that “nature, the biggest bank of all, could go bust.”²⁸¹

In addition to wilderness areas been reconfigured to sites of consumption through the perpetuation of what Stephen Nugent calls “eco-domains,” Jim Igoe argues further that these “spectacular” representations of nature also serve to depoliticize the politics of environmentalism by concealing relations of inequality. He states, for example, that “pristine virtual representation of nature mask . . . and supplant the widespread disruptions to actual nature derived from extraction and consumption.”²⁸² This is also discussed by Guy Debord who saw “spectacle” as a fundamental feature in late capitalism which points to images becoming “commodified [that are] alienated from the relations that produced them and consumed in ignorance of the same.”²⁸³ For Marx, commodity fetishism depicts the ways in which capitalist production hides the social relations behind production. Nature becomes commodity, then, when it is reproduced and consumed without reference to the relationships and contexts from which it was produced. Thus, the elisions at the center of the spectacularization of nature conceals “the socio-economic complexities of tropical deforestation and its connection to Western consumer society, the

²⁸⁰ Conservation International, “Nature is Speaking.”

²⁸¹ Igoe, “The Spectacle Of Nature In The Global Economy Of Appearances,” p. 382.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 377.

²⁸³ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1967).

displacement and impoverishment of people by conservation interventions, and the impacts of mass tourism on specific ecosystems, as well as in terms of carbon emissions.”²⁸⁴ In doing so, it legitimizes consumption and the capitalist actors dependent on it by glossing over the realities of ecological destruction.

As noted by Dan Brockington, the use of celebrities also features at the heart of these new forms of capitalist accumulation in conservation.²⁸⁵ In general, there are many studies highlighting the links between capitalism and celebrity. Chris Rojek argues, for example, that celebrities perpetuate an “ideology of heroic individualism, upward mobility and choice in social conditions where standardization, monotony, and routine prevail.”²⁸⁶ Celebrities, therefore, represent the success stories in which people can aspire to, despite the reality of extreme wealth being a necessary exception, rather than a realistic norm, in capitalist economies. Other viewpoints interpret the existence of celebrities as a “tonic” for alienated masses in which to “vicariously live better lives,” rather than an invention created from above to maintain utopian delusions of capitalism.²⁸⁷ Importantly, as Brockington points out, both viewpoints “hold that celebrities exist to facilitate increase, and encourage consumption” by legitimating capitalist norms of accumulation.²⁸⁸ Foucauldian perspectives relate to this in that they understand the function of celebrities to be one that reproduces dominant discourses—about the merits of hard work or the virtues of obedience, for example—so as to better control populations and limit

²⁸⁴ Igoe, “The Spectacle Of Nature In The Global Economy Of Appearances,” p. 380.

²⁸⁵ Dan Brockington, “Powerful Environmentalism: Conservation, Celebrity and Capitalism,” *Media, Culture and Society* 30, no. 4 (2008): 551-568.

²⁸⁶ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), p. 33.

²⁸⁷ Brockington, “Powerful Environmentalism: Conservation, Celebrity and Capitalism.”

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

ideological resistance.²⁸⁹ In the case of environmentalism, Brockington argues that a similar process occurs in that celebrities lend moral authority to mainstream discourses of environmentalism that conform to already dominant, and dominating, ideals of appropriate environmental protection. It is interesting to note, therefore, that the celebrities used in the “Nature Is Speaking” campaign are all popular actors with high credibility and are generally well received in broader society.

The depiction of people in the videos also serves to exacerbate these processes of depoliticization and oversimplification. When Harrison Ford (personifying a redwood tree) is explaining the history of life to a young sapling, he describes, “all of sudden, there were humans. And hell broke loose.”²⁹⁰ Indeed, the withering tone towards human relationships with nature is a commonality throughout all the videos. The assumption is innocuous at first glance: if nature could speak, it would not be happy with humans. The representation of human activity as inherently “bad” in ecological terms, however, is problematic. Notably absent in this depiction, for example, are the myriad ways in which how political, economic, and cultural relations mediate between humans and their environments; in short, the plurality of human-nature relations. Also missing is the recognition that ecological destruction is not carried out by all humans equally but that the destruction of the environment is largely carried out by a few distinct agents, mostly corporations and governments, and not humans in general terms. Humans, therefore, portrayed in the same homogenous terms as nature, represented as equally culpable in the destruction of the environment, serves to further gloss over, and depoliticize, the realities of ecological destruction.

²⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, Alan Sheridan, trans., *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

²⁹⁰ Conservation International, “Nature is Speaking.”

The commodification and connected depoliticization of nature protection, therefore, leads to assumptions of easy fixes in solving ecological crises, fixes that do not involve questions of power or questions of economic inequality. Indeed, apart from vague warnings about nature not needing humans and abstract assertions of the necessity of change, the only hint at a practical action is the box that appears when you enter the “Nature Is Speaking” webpage that suggest a sixty dollar donation. The apparent message here is that donating money to Conservation International will solve, or go some way towards solving, the problem of ecological degradation. Thus, there is another similarity to more general corporate advertising campaigns, the objectives of which are to persuade consumers to buy (in this case, donate) to the product.

What’s Wrong With “Nature” In the Green Economy

The representation of nature in the campaign, therefore, is predominantly a *commodified* nature. The campaign emphasizes that human’s need nature (not the other way around) but despite the focus on necessity, the images themselves are devoid of people, instead demonstrating panoramic shots of pristine nature and vast vistas. The rhetoric of necessity and the simultaneous spectacular-ization of nature is connected, however, by a mutual process of commodification, where nature is subject to the processes of capitalist appropriation and discourse of “nature saving” is imbued with profit potential. This commodification serves, therefore, to “sell” nature protection, and engage citizen/consumers to aid in saving nature, in this case, donate money. This conforms to Robert Fletcher et al.’s view that

Conservation and nature [are] increasingly presented to and experienced by people through constructed (and commodified) goods and activities such as wildlife safaris, (eco)tourism adventures, documentaries, websites, animal memorabilia and so forth Many of these have in common that they are void of (local) people, thus perpetuating a heavily criticized nature/culture dichotomy that has long impacted negatively on local people’s livelihoods Representations and experiences of “unspoilt” nature, however,

have become the capital on which conservation organizations, and increasingly private and governmental actors, depend to engage consumers in issues such as biodiversity loss or to promote a 'green' image and attract tourists.²⁹¹

The commodification of nature is not only reinforced through the presentation of spectacular nature, but also reflected in the way the natural world is described in the videos. Nature is invariably presented through the vantage point of instrumentality; thus, the coral reefs are a "protein factory" and the rain forest "a medicine cabinet." The slogan of the campaign "People Need Nature" exacerbates this point, as nature is depicted as useful/critical (providing essential services) while simultaneously abstract (something separate to humans). This characterization conforms to broader descriptions of neoliberal nature as a "service providers" but also, as Arsel and Buschser describe, as a "distinct corpus, an entity, that stands outside of society and economy."²⁹²

In this way, then, the picture of nature, as depicted in the campaign, conforms to, and complements, broader processes of neoliberal environmentalism and broader constructions of neoliberal natures. Nature become reconfigured under neoliberalism, "co-produced by science in this unfolding economic and policy order, and institutionalized by powerful organizations, whether the World Bank, international conservation NGOs or the Convention of Biodiversity."²⁹³ Neoliberal natures emerge *from* the neoliberalization of nature conservation as natures that are directly commodifiable and primarily identifiable for their instrumental and economic worth. The truism of the ecological sciences that "everything in nature hangs together"

²⁹¹ Fletcher, et al., "Nature™ Inc.: Nature As Neoliberal Capitalist Imaginary," p. 368.

²⁹² Murat Arsel and Bram Büscher, "Nature™ Inc: Changes and Continuities in Neoliberal Conservation and Environmental Markets," *Development and Change* 43 (2012): 53–78, p. 59.

²⁹³ MacDonald, "Grabbing 'Green': Cynical Reason, Instrumental Ethics and The Production Of 'The Green Economy,'" p. 54.

is replaced by another; namely, that “everything in nature has a price.” As James Fairhead et al. write:

Thus the ‘green gaze’ valuing a tropical forest now sees deep down to its underground potential for carbon storage, its solar absorption, its soil and water as a potential for biofuel production (palm oil, sugar and *Jatropha*), its trees as a source of REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) funding (perhaps doubling as a potential source of sustainable biochar), and its biodiversity as a source of global conservation funding or tourism revenue.²⁹⁴

As described above, this reductionism is also apparent in the depiction of people in the campaign. Like in neoliberal environmentalism more broadly, the perception of people is one of rational maximizers of utility, as *Homo economicus*, which, if not given adequate incentivization, will continue in a somewhat linear path of ecological destruction. Sanjayan asserts, for example, the “love alone is not enough,” we need to emphasize that we *need* this place. The objective in the video, therefore, is to emphasize necessity, to lead people to the recognition that it is on our enlightened self-interest to protect nature. Although this is, of course, accurate, the depiction of people as rationality maximizers and innately selfish leads to a further de-politicization of the relationship between the corporate actors (and the funders of the campaign and organization) and ecological harm by assuming that all people are responsible equally for ecological degradation, facilitated by the representation of humanity in homogenous terms, and the lack of recognition in relation to varying agents and processes of ecological degradation.

Thus, nature is represented as both spectacular product and service provider, essential to, and separate from, humans. Indeed, although the stated objective of the videos is to rebrand environmentalism, there is also a sense that nature is getting rebranded to, made anew as a (very

²⁹⁴ James Fairhead, Melissa Leach, and Ian Scoones, “Green Grabbing: A New Appropriation of Nature,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 12, no. 2 (2012): 237-261, p. 242.

important) product. The use of celebrities, corporate marketing techniques, and social media further exacerbates this process of commodification.

The process of commodifying nonhuman (and human) nature, however, is not a new phenomenon. The depiction and production of nonhumans as commodities has been around for as the capitalist mode of production, and arguably before.²⁹⁵ One of the earliest critics with regard to commodification of natural entities is Karl Polanyi, who asserted that the monetization of nature and humans under capitalism leads to ontological transformations in social life, where nature becomes “resource” and humans “labor.”²⁹⁶ These are what he calls “fictitious commodities,” and occur when things such as trees, water, and people—things that have ecological, intrinsic, social, and cultural worth—are treated as having only monetary value.²⁹⁷ Such commodification, Polanyi argues, is ontologically inherent, because ultimately they are “not true commodities that can be managed purely by price signals and controlled by the market.” Nature is more than the sum of its benefits to humans, and humans are more than labor. When this metaphysical reality is obscured through a domination of market rationale, however, it can lead to devastating consequences as human and natural value and worth becomes subject to the whims of market pressures and the laws of supply and demand. Taken to the extreme, according to Polanyi, it can lead to a double movement, where the economic system, by focusing only on market values, degrades the very biophysical conditions it depends on, which, in turn, leads to a social counter-reaction which seeks to re-embed and restrain the marketization process through social and ecological protection such as labor law and environmental regulations.

²⁹⁶ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

By and large, however, it seems that a Polanyian double movement has been replaced, or marginalized, by a focus on hyper commodification in environmental protection, represented by neoliberal environmentalisms that assert that only when you put a price on nature, when you emphasize its blunt instrumentality, can it be “saved.” What is relatively new, in other words, is the “widespread effort on the part of capitalist industry to internalize natural resources an integral component of production for sustainable management in the long term rather than externalizing environmental costs in the interests of short term profit.” Thus, nature, as made manifest in the narrative of the green economy and other novel environmental frameworks, is transformed into natural capital: a nature that is monetized and subsequently made accountable in the global market.

Selling nature to save it, however, has some problems. Somewhat in line with a Polanyian critique, for example, Morgan Robinson points out that one consequence of submitting nature to capital is that the natural environment must be transformed in order to be visible to the demands of capital.²⁹⁸ Commenting on the flower, *Aster Simplex*, a plant in the sunflower family, she notes that *Aster* has never been taxonomically simple due to complications in morphological distinction. Attempts to define and categorize the species has led to a varying arrays of descriptions, with “no current consensus on the very existence of a coherent and discrete species called *Aster simplex*.” Although usually taxonomical complications such as this would be an engaging matter for botanists only, Robinson argues that scientific debates about taxonomy are increasingly important beyond the scope of scientific concern. With the rise of ecosystem services as the guiding framework for environmental protection, the group of plants in the genus

²⁹⁸ Morgan Robinson, “The Nature That Capital Can See: Science, State, and Market in the Commodification of Ecosystem Services,” *Environment and Planning* 24, no. 3 (2006): 367-387.

Aster are now significant because the federal government understands only certain plants as serving as indicators of a functioning wetland ecosystem that, in turn, provides critical services to humans, such as detoxification, climate change mitigation, and flood regulation. Wetland ecosystems matching the federal description, thus, “produce ecosystem services that can now be sold on the market.”²⁹⁹ Ones that do not are not subject to internalization, or indeed, any form of accounting. Thus, she notes:

The methods and techniques of ecosystem assessment must describe a nature that capital can “see” —that has an uncontroversial measure—in order for trade to occur. However, these assessment methods currently produce unstable data that are rendered meaningful in economic terms only by dint of creative and ad hoc efforts at translation by field technicians. It is suggested that this may represent a practical limit or crisis point in the expansion of capital relations, or at least a complication in the streamlined neoliberal narratives about the commodification of ecosystem services.³⁰⁰

Problems with fitting nature to conform to capital is also evident in the Green Economy approach of biodiversity offsetting, the mechanism of compensating for ecological losses in one place by establishing or creating net gains in biodiversity elsewhere (at another time). As Evangelina Apostolopoulou and William Adams point out, however, the idea of natural systems and nature embedded in this approach is significantly at odds with broader principles of ecology.³⁰¹ The system works, for example, by creating metrics that score biodiversity losses and gains in a numerical framework and advocates that biodiversity losses in one place must be made up elsewhere (at another time). According to the authors, however, creating metrics that score biodiversity losses and gains and assert that biodiversity loss in one place, at one time, is equivalent to a biodiversity gain somewhere else at another time leads to a reductionist approach

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 367.

³⁰⁰ Evangelina Apostolopoulou and William Adams, “Biodiversity Offsetting and Conservation: Reframing Nature to Save It,” *Oryx* 51, no. 1 (2017): 23–31.

³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 25.

to ecosystems and reproduces misleading notions of simplicity, potentially leading to a “retreat from the study of intrinsically complex systems.”³⁰² In addition, the notion of “equivalent natures” reinforces perceptions of nature as a system of divisible and distinct units, an understanding that is deeply contrary to the basic principles of biology. In contrast, the authors maintain that “ecosystems are dialectically composed, multi-layered systems that do not form simply mappable units, and biodiversity is non-interchangeable in terms of type, space and time.”³⁰³

Conclusion

Recent frameworks of the Green Economy are part of a wider shift towards ecomodern strategies in environmental governance, connected to a growing fluidity of boundaries between public and private actors in the domain of environmentalism. As I analyzed in chapter four, the growth of private sector engagement in environmental politics can lead to a shift in ecological frameworks and ideologies towards more market-friendly mechanisms. It may also, as I have suggested in this chapter, have consequences with regard to how nature is perceived, imagined, and produced in mainstream environmental organizations. The representation of nature and human-nature relationships in the “Nature Is Speaking” campaign by Conservation International succeeds in satisfying the intentions of the organization: to “rebrand environmentalism” and encourage recognition of the instrumental value of nature. It also, however, conforms to larger ecomodern projects that center on the creation of environmental commodities and the pricing of ecosystem services.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

The following chapter examines ecomodernism in a more general way. I analyze the extent to which the theory and success of ecomodernism is reflective of an infiltration of certain kinds of interests and actors within the framework, and within environmentalism more generally. Specifically, I suggest that ecomodernism represents a *powerful* environmentalism, insofar as it has both strong institutional and ideological attachments to the dominant social and economic forces, and is supported, reproduced and constructed by some of the most powerful actors in society.

CHAPTER 6

ECOMODERNISM AS POWERFUL ENVIRONMENTALISM

Ecomodernism is now understood to be one of the dominant frameworks to address current ecological concerns.³⁰⁴ It emphasizes economic incentives, technological advancements, and the monetization of ecological services as means to solve environmental problems. Popular discourses such as “sustainable development,” “green consumption,” and the more recent “Green Economy” provide examples of ecomodern frameworks, as do the use of economic incentives, such as the Polluters Pay Principles, the introduction of carbon taxes, etc.

At its core, ecomodernism expresses a faith in current political and economic structures to re-orient themselves to achieve environmental sustainability. It differs from other environmental discourses, such as many laid out—and lived—by indigenous, ecofeminist, and environmental justice groups, who advocate a radical restructuring of contemporary society on the basis of ecological principles. In contrast, advocates of ecomodernism argue that incremental, modern, strategies are satisfactory to achieve positive environmental ends. As described by Maarten Hajer, ecomodernism “recognizes the structural character of environmental problems but nonetheless assumes that existing political, economic and social structures can internalize the care for the environment.”³⁰⁵ As reflected in these structures, ecomodernism supposes that our current institutions can correct a “design fault” of modernity which has traditionally led to the externalizing of negatives, such as pollution and waste, onto other cultures, species, locations and times. Through this correction, environmental negatives can be correctly accounted for, and

³⁰⁵ Martin Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 33.

economic incentives can encourage ecologically responsible behavior without sacrificing economic growth. Ecological care, once left out, is now brought back in.

Ecomodernism, therefore, ostensibly placing priority on environmental concern, is recognized by many as an ecological shift in contemporary thinking. Its critics, however, question the efficacy, strength, and authenticity of this shift. Frederick Buttel, for example, argues that ecomodernism lacks an “identifiable set of postulates,”³⁰⁶ while John Bellamy Foster posits that “ecological modernization skirts some of the main challenges that ecological problems pose for social democratic thought.”³⁰⁷ Further, Bobby Banarjee argues that rather than represent a challenge to the logic of modern capitalist society, eco-modernization narratives emerge *from* capitalist and elite interests, and thereby produce and reproduce the inequalities inherent to the neoliberal process.³⁰⁸

In this chapter, therefore, I want to draw and elaborate on some of these critiques. I agree with critical ecomodernism theorists who argue that its focus on economic, over ecological, rationality may be counterproductive to the stated goals of ecomodernism. Along these veins, I analyze the extent to which the theory and success of ecomodernism is reflective of an infiltration of certain kinds of interests and actors within the framework, and within environmentalism more generally. Specifically, I suggest that ecomodernism represents a *powerful* environmentalism, insofar as it has both strong institutional and ideological attachments to the dominant social and economic forces; and is supported, reproduced and constructed by some of the most powerful actors in society. Ecomodernism gains its power from, not in spite,

³⁰⁶ Frederick Buttel, “Ecological Modernization as Social Theory,” *Geoforum* 31 (2000): 57-65.

³⁰⁷ John Bellamy Foster, “The Planetary Rift and the New Human Exceptionalism: A Political-Economic Critique of Ecological Modernization Theory,” *Organization & Environment* 25, no. 3 (2012):211-237, p. 220.

³⁰⁸ Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, “Who Sustains Whose Development? Sustainable Development and the Reinvention of Nature,” *Organization Studies* 24, no. 1 (2003): 143-180.

dominant prevailing interests, and thus tends to produce and reproduce mechanisms of ecological protection and frameworks of human/non-human co-inhabitation that conform to the status quo. How this domination affects other expression of environmental care, as well as some problems with its own implementation, is discussed towards the end of the chapter.

Industrial Caterpillars and the Institutionalization of Environmentalism

The dirty and ugly industrial caterpillar will transform into a[n] ecological butterfly.

Joseph Huber

One popular narrative of environmentalism is that it has become institutionalized. While the early environmental movement was perceived as radical, intent on subverting the social, economic, and political order, more contemporary versions of environmentalism are incremental, happy to work with existing political and economic structures and/or to rely on technological fixes. Cary Coglianese claims that environmentalism moved from being a “small constituency” to a “major force”³⁰⁹ in culture, but as it grew and institutionalized, its normative structure began to change. It did not continue the radical, anti-establishment, protests of the sixties and seventies, but rather followed a more gradual route of seeking reform from within. It went from “outside” to “inside,” from demanding transformational change to being content with the compatibility of the environmental agenda with other dominant spheres of the political spectrum. The position of the environmental movement changed from subversion to one of friendly diplomacy with one environmental lawyer remarking at the time “before, we filed law

³⁰⁹ Coglianese, "Social Movements, Law, and Society: The Institutionalization of the Environmental Movement."

suits, and held press conferences. Now we have lunch with the assistant secretary to discuss the program.”³¹⁰

Although the narrative of institutionalization is somewhat flawed in its overgeneralization as well as its Western focus (the trajectory of radical-to-institutionalized is somewhat particular to Western environmentalism and does not necessarily reflect environmentalism in the global south or that of indigenous communities, etc.), it can be helpful for understanding contemporary mainstream environmentalism in some of its forms. Indeed, narratives of sustainable development, green/ethical consumption and free-market environmentalism, are all increasingly popular environmental frameworks, while discourses of biocentrism, deep ecology, and ecofeminism are somewhat more marginalized.

Part of the “success” of environmentalisms institutionalization is an optimism in the ability of modernity to fix some of the flaws that have led to environmental degradation. Modernity, as defined by Anthony Giddens, refers to “modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence.”³¹¹ It is both a conceptual framework and living system which emphasizes scientific rationality over spirituality, expresses an optimism with regard technological changes, advocates democracy, free markets, and maintains an overall confident in the ability of the human mind to perpetuate a constant and linear manifestation of progress. Indeed, Max Weber describes that central to the adoption of modernization theory is a “metaphysical . . . belief in progress.”³¹² This progress, as John Bellamy Foster and others point

³¹⁰ Helen M. Ingram et al., “Interest Groups and Environmental Policy,” *Environmental Politics and Policy* 18 (1998): 115-129.

³¹¹ Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p.58.

³¹² Max Weber, *Roscher and Knies* (New York: Free Press, 1975).

out, is intimately linked to ideas pertaining to the conquest of nature. Indeed, “to be modern,” as Jeffrey Alexander describes, “is to believe that the masterful transformation of the world [including all of nature] is possible, indeed that it is likely.”³¹³

Although more radical forms of environmentalism reject many aspects of modernity, the institutionalized environmentalism that emerged in the late seventies and is dominant today is confident in the potential of reconfiguring contemporary institutions to make them more “green,” sustainable, and ecologically just. Reflecting this confidence, Joseph Huber notes that the “dirty and ugly industrial caterpillar will transform into a[n] ecological butterfly.”³¹⁴

Internalizing Care: Eco-Modernization as a “New” Theory of Environmentalism

One of the central frameworks that reflected this transformation was ecomodernism (also called eco-modernization and ecological modernization). The theory of ecomodernism was first developed in the early 1980s in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Its early theorists include Martin Janicke, Volker von Prittwitz, Klaus Zimmermann, Gert Spaargaren, Maartin Hajer, Arthur P. Mol, Albert Weale and Maurie Cohen.³¹⁵ Maurie Cohen, a leading proponent, describes ecomodernism as a framework which “aims to harness the power of human ingenuity for the purpose of harmonizing economic advancement with environmental improvement.”³¹⁶ In that respect, it poses a classic win-win scenario, in line with both

³¹³ Jeffrey Alexander, “Between Progress and Apocalypse: Social Theory and the Dream of Reason in the Twentieth Century,” in J. C. Alexander and P. Sztopka, ed. *Rethinking Progress* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 15-38.

³¹⁴ Huber, “Die Regenbogengesellschaft. Ökologie und Sozialpolitik.”

³¹⁵ Arthur P. J. Mol and David A. Sonnenfeld, “Ecological Modernization around the World: An Introduction,” *Environmental Politics* 9, no. 1 (2000): 3-16.

³¹⁶ Maurie J. Cohen, “Risk Society and Ecological Modernization: Alternative Visions for Post-Industrial Nations,” *Futures* 29, no. 2 (1997): 105-119.

environmental concerns and with economic advancement. We can “do good” for the environment without having to sacrifice modern understandings of progress. In short, without having to compromise economic growth. One of the base assumptions of ecomodernism, therefore, is that the solution to the environmental crisis lies in the advancement of the “reflexive knowledge that characterizes modern thinking.”³¹⁷ This faith in modernity and the market represents the cornerstone of the theory of ecomodernism. The project of modernity is viewed as inherently reflexive, capable of adjusting to faults and reorienting itself in the face of novel concerns.

Notions of “reflexive modernity” arise in the work Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash.³¹⁸ Beck, for example, in his idea of “risk society” claims that the project of modernity has resulted in two central features. One is the taming of nature by modern technology and science. Examples include flood control and electricity production. The other is the creation of the industry that creates new risks, replacing natural dangers with those emerging as a result of modern technology. He states that the production of nuclear power establishments, the disposal of harmful substances into the natural environment and the increase of scientific discoveries all pose, in the words of Maurie Cohen, a “daily threat of catastrophic proportions.”³¹⁹ These technological advances, initially emerging as a reaction to problems of economic scarcity now override all other risks, economic or otherwise, in their effect on the general population. According to Beck, however, the second phase of modernity, or “modernizing modernity,” is one that reacts, reflex-like, to the problems of the earlier forms.³²⁰

³¹⁷ Steward Clegg and Renato Orsato, “Radical Reformism: Towards Critical Ecological Modernization,” *Sustainable Development* 13 (2005): 253-267.

³¹⁸ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992).

³¹⁹ Cohen, “Risk Society and Ecological Modernization: Alternative Visions for Post-Industrial Nations,” p. 30.

³²⁰ Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*.

Modernity can deal with the problems of its own creation by constant improvement through reflection. As described by Foster, “some have characterized the reflex-like response, stipulated by reflexive modernity (and ecological modernization) theory, as a “new automatism,” in which industrialization is both self-generating and self-improving.”³²¹

Thus, the idea of *reflexivity*, that modernity can improve itself, is the central defining feature of ecomodernism. Through this feature, the capitalist inclinations towards economic growth, do not have to be discarded, but rather they can be resolved with environmental goals. With ecomodernism, “economic growth and the resolution of ecological problems can, in principle, be reconciled.”³²²

Ecomodernism as Powerful Environmentalism

Ecomodernism has been described as a paradigm shift in contemporary thinking involving environmental management. Indeed, central to the concept of ecomodernism is the idea of transformation; that our current societal and economic structures can be transformed on the basis of new principles. While traditionally the principles were exclusively economic, these novel principles give equal attention to ecological and cultural well-being. Thus, the changes in our value systems would encourage transformation shifts, but not upheavals, in our contemporary institutions.

Despite the rhetoric of change, however, critics of ecomodernism focus on how distinctly un-radical the theory is in practice. One common thread embedded in both the normative structure and the policy implications of ecomodernism is that it explicitly fails to challenge the

³²¹ Foster, “The Planetary Rift and the New Human Exceptionalism,” p.221.

³²² Martin Hajer. ‘Ecological Modernisation as Cultural Politics,’ in Scott Lash, et al. ed., *Risk, Environment and Modernity: Towards a New Ecology* (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 246 –268.

“capitalist juggernaut of production.”³²³ As Fisher and Freudenburg note, ecomodernism is largely successful due to its “political feasibility.”³²⁴ In contrast to alternative environmental discourses that emphasize broad structural adjustments, ecomodernism is characterized by its belief and confidence in existing political and economic institutions, especially the institutions of the free market. Indeed, advocates of ecomodernism generally embrace private sector partnerships with open arms rather than with the skepticism that one might expect given the impacts of industrial activity on the environment. Additionally, private sector mechanisms, such as payment for ecosystem services, often governed by private sector actors, are increasingly a significant aspect of contemporary environmental governance.

Cooperation, therefore, is a central element in this process. Sheldon Kamienicki reflects this approach in his claim that ecomodernism “is achieved not through adversarial process, but by bringing government and business together within a cooperative framework.”³²⁵ Political feasibility and cooperation with government and corporate bodies, however, is, under any other name, an acceptance of prevailing dominant interests. As Foster notes, for example, the legitimacy of ecomodernism is correlated with the extent to which it accepts establishment ideas, stating that

ecological modernization exponents frequently point to leading political and corporate figures and establishment pundits (as well as to powerful international organizations and processes)—rather than to leading natural scientists or environmental social scientists—as evidence of the dominance, that is, the power within the establishment, and hence the “truth,” of their ideas.³²⁶

³²³ James Mc Carthy and Scott Prudham, “Neoliberal Nature and the Nature of Neoliberalism,” *Geoforum* 35, no. 3 (2003): 275-283, p. 279.

³²⁴ Dana Fisher and William Freudenburg, “Ecological Modernization and its Critics: Assessing Past and Present,” *Society and Natural Resources* 14 (2001): 701-709.

³²⁵ Sheldon Kamieniecki, *Corporate America and Environmental Policy: How Often Does Business Get in the Way?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 87.

³²⁶ Foster, “The Planetary Rift and the New Human Exceptionalism,” p.219.

Indeed, Schlosberg and Rinfret in their article, *Ecological Modernization, American Style*, singles out celebrities, such as Tom Hanks and corporations such as WalMart as “icons of ecological modernization.”³²⁷ Hajer reflects the “truths” of ecomodernism further, writing

The dyed-in-the-wool radicals of the 1970s had a point but failed to get it through. This was partly due to the rather unqualified nature of their Totalkritik. The new consensus on ecological modernization is here attributed to a process of maturation of the environmental movement: after a radical phase the issue was taken off the streets and the movement became institutionalized as so many social movements before it. With the adoption of the discourse of ecological modernization its protagonists now speak the proper language and have been integrated in the advisory boards where they fulfill a “tremendously important” role showing how we can design new institutional forms to come to terms with environmental problems.³²⁸

As Foster describes it, therefore, the consensual nature of ecological modernization discourse that Hajer refers here is the “hegemonic consensus of power.”³²⁹ Ecomodernism is granted legitimacy *because* of its institutional connections, both normative and descriptive. It uses the “proper language,” which Hajer describes as “the language of business,” and in so doing, produces and reproduces a narrative of legitimacy and power.

The connections between ecomodernism and prevailing dominant social interests is also reflected financially. As Giorgi and Redclift demonstrate, EU funding of environmental research is disproportionately directed at work which intends to further ecomodern perspectives.³³⁰ Within conservation, Rebecca Goldman and colleagues shows that private sector funding is more likely to go to ecomodern projects, specifically those that use the framework of payment for ecosystem

³²⁷ David Schlosberg and Sara Rinfret, “Ecological Modernisation, American Style,” *Environmental Politics* 17, no. 2 (2008): 254-275.

³²⁸ Hajer. ‘Ecological Modernisation as Cultural Politics,’ p. 251.

³²⁹ Foster, “The Planetary Rift and the New Human Exceptionalism,” p.223.

³³⁰ Liana Giorgi and Michael Redclift, “European Experimental Research into Ecological Modernisation as a “Boundary Object,” *European Environment* 10 (2000): 12-23.

services,³³¹ and a similar trend is noted by Robert Brulle and Craig Jenkins who demonstrate that private sector funding for environmentalism in the U.S. goes disproportionately to those projects which do not challenge the structural components of contemporary society, in other words, projects of ecomodernism,³³² and thereby exclude discourses that do, including environmental justice, ecofeminism, etc. As described by Banerjee, ecomodernist frameworks such as sustainable development, are supported and produced by transnational institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, as well as large corporations.³³³ The Breakthrough Institute, a leading supporter and creator of ecomodern policies, and who recently published “A Ecomodernist Manifesto,” was established by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, and among its advisory boards are members of corporate institutions, such as Google, etc.

Additionally, as I have discussed in this dissertation, private sector actors involved in environmentalism through frameworks of philanthropy and corporate social responsibility tend to support, and construct, ecomodern frameworks of ecological protection. The vision of sustainability that was aggressively promoted by the WBSCD, as a “win-win” framework of green development that does not challenge economic growth, went on to subsequently become, , the dominant way that sustainability is understood and implemented in environmental governance. Further, as analyzed in the previous chapter, the representations of the natural environment that emerge from public-private organizations, such as Conservation International,

³³¹ Rebecca Goldman et al., “Field Evidence that Ecosystem Service Projects Support Biodiversity and Diversify Options,” *PNAS* 105, no. 29 (2008): 9445-9448.

³³² Robert Brulle and Craig Jenkins, ‘Foundations and the Environmental Movement: Priorities, Strategies, and Impact,’ in D. Faber, and D. McCarthy, ed., *Foundations for Social Change: Critical Perspectives on Philanthropy and Popular Movements*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), pp. 151-173.

³³³ Banerjee, “Who Sustains Whose Development? Sustainable Development and the Reinvention of Nature.”

tend to be ones that conforms to ecomodern, instrumental understandings of nature that focus on the commodifiable aspects of the environment and generally maintain a strict dichotomy between human and non-human nature.

This influence of private sector actors is especially apparent with regard to more novel frameworks of ecomodernism, such as the Green Economy, discussed in the previous chapter. The green economy promulgates a particularly aggressive form of ecomodernism—an ecomodernism 2.0—in that not only is capitalist production perceived to be compatible with ecological well-being, but capitalist forces are understood as essential to the cause. Nature, in order to be protected, has to be viewed in terms of the logic of capitalist production; nature, in order to be “saved,” has to be sold.³³⁴ Like “business” versions of sustainable development before it, the frameworks of the Green Economy are constructed and supported by private sector and other elite actors in environmental governance. The Green Energy Coalition, for example, established in 2011 as a precursor to the Rio conference by the United Nations, and that promoted the “recapitalization of our natural resource base to ‘incentivize investment,’”³³⁵ was comprised mostly of private sector associations and NGOs heavily supported by the private sector.³³⁶ Additionally, private sector alliances, most notably high-ranking officials in Deutsche Bank, were central in the creation of other documents, such as the UNEP’s Green Economy Report and the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) report, both of which promoted the pricing of “natural capital” (the services provided to humans by nature) and led to the subsequent creation of the Bank of Natural Capital, and ultimately served as foundational

³³⁴ McAfee, “Selling Nature to Save It? Biodiversity and Green Developmentalism.”

³³⁵ Robert Brulle and Craig Jenkins, ‘Foundations and the Environmental Movement: Priorities, Strategies, and Impact,’ in D. Faber, and D. McCarthy, ed., *Foundations for Social Change: Critical Perspectives on Philanthropy and Popular Movements*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), pp. 151-173.

³³⁶ Salleh, “The Green Economy: Class Hegemony and Counter Hegemony.”

documents for the subsequent formulation of the green economy at Rio + 20.³³⁷

Further, in addition to the promulgation of ecomodern frameworks by powerful actors, there are also other aspects of ecomodernism that contributes to its position as a *dominant*, or *powerful* environmentalism. For Bruno Latour, for example, the very idea of modernism itself refers to understandings of the present (and future) that are dependent upon very distinct ideas of the past as *antithetical* to the modern project. He writes

I have emphasized many times that "modernism" carries with it another idea, that of emancipation from some stagnant, archaic and stifling past, so that "modern" is always a way to orient action according to an arrow of time that distinguishes the past from the future. An essential component of the concept of modernity is the idea of a future toward which we travel after a *radical rupture* with the past. Such an arrow of time orients action in a highly specific way and gives to the future a very specific coloration of emancipation and to the past a sense of stagnant archaism.³³⁸

Thus, modernity, for Latour, is a very specific "orientation of action," dependent upon the perception of a distinct break from the past. Thus, he states, "to modernize is to distribute agencies along a gradient that allows the orientation of action in such a way that those who resist — who remain backward, who remain archaic, etc. — are beaten into submission."³³⁹ Modernity, then, doesn't just refer to modes of action, but also to particular alignments that are embedded within linear notions of progress; and that "carry" the marginalization of counter-modern visions. Narratives of ecomodernism often conform to this particular alignment, with environmental frameworks that deviate from that the "pragmatism" of ecomodernist accounts critiqued for their anti-scientific and/or spiritual frameworks.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Bruno Latour, "Fifty Shades of Green," presentation to the panel on modernism at the Breakthrough Dialog, Sausalito, June 2015, published in Stephen Muecke, *Environmental Humanities* 7 (2015): 219-225.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Paul McLaughlin, "Ecological Modernization in Evolutionary Perspective," *Organization & Environment* 25, no. 22 (2012): 178-196, p. 180.

The Problem with Powerful Environmentalisms

Thus, ecomodernism can be understood as *powerful* environmentalism in that it has both strong institutional and ideological attachments to the dominant social and economic forces, and is supported, reproduced and constructed by some of the most powerful actors in society. The status of ecomodernism as powerful, however, may lead to problems with regard to the marginalization of alternative expressions of environmental care.

Indeed, the domination of one kind of environmentalism over another is not a new phenomenon. As discussed at length by Mark Dowie and others, specifically Western perceptions of wilderness as vast areas of pristine nature, devoid of humans, manifested in the creation of national parks, has conflicted with other expressions of environmental identity, specifically environmentalisms that primarily value nature for the provisioning of basic resources, such as food, water, shelter, in addition to cultural and symbolic meaning.³⁴¹ Dan Brockington, for example, describes a “dominant environmentalism,” largely emanating from conservation organizations, political institutions, and celebrity environmentalists of the global North that values “pristine lands untouched—and uninfluenced by people,”³⁴² and that promulgates frameworks of environmental protection based on the privatization of natural resources and the creation of boundaries between nonhuman and human nature, especially as it pertains to human inhabitants. In contrast, he asserts, environmentalisms of the South tend to value the environment for, among other things, “their contributions to livelihoods,” and thus clash with any frameworks that restrict relationships of co-inhabitation and resource use.

This clash between what Brockington calls “grounded” and “ungrounded”

³⁴¹ Mark Dowie, *Conservation Refugees* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011).

³⁴² Brockington, “Powerful Environmentalisms: Conservation, Celebrity and Capitalism,” p. 555.

environmentalisms has led to significant conflict, usually involving conservation organizations and governments, and indigenous peoples, and dating back to the creation of the first national parks. The establishment of the National Parks in the United States, for example, led to the displacement of hundreds of Native American tribes. In 1877, in the creation of the Yellowstone National Park, 300 people were killed in the conflict with the U.S. army.³⁴³ Although this was common with regard to the first parks, events like this are ongoing as people are still being displaced for the purposes of the creation of national parks in such places as Thailand³⁴⁴ and Botswana.³⁴⁵ Although each situation differs, displacement can refer to physical displacement due to forced removal in some capacity, or economic displacement as a result of hunting ban and/or a restricted use of other natural resources in general. In a somewhat bizarre situation in Uganda, the Batwa pygmy community were removed from their ancestral lands due to the establishment of a national park, and are now only allowed back in to perform their old lifestyles for the enjoyment of tourists.³⁴⁶ Importantly, in all of these cases, the creation of national parks is tied to projected or actual profits from ecotourism, currently one of the fastest growing industries in the world.³⁴⁷ In addition to physical and economic displacement, these processes of displacement also invariably involve the “obliteration of local histories and associations with the land,” and the environmental identities of the people and communities living there.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ See Reiner Buergin, “Shifting Frames for Local People and Forests in a Global Heritage: The Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary in the Context of Thailand’s Globalization and Modernization,” *Geoforum* 24 (2003): 375–93; Jin Sato, “Karen and the Land in Between: Public and Private Enclosure of Forests in Thailand,” *Development and Change* 31, no. 1 (2000): 155–177.

³⁴⁵ Robert Hitchcock, “Removals, Politics and Human Rights,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2002): 25–6.

³⁴⁶ Melanie Gouby, “The Real Pygmies Experience: Evicted Batwa People Now Just Act Out Previous Life for Tourists,” *Vice News*, 21 July, 2015, <https://news.vice.com/article/the-real-pygmy-experience-evicted-batwa-people-now-just-act-out-a-previous-life-for-tourists>.

³⁴⁷ Kenneth F. Backman and Ian Manunura, “Introduction to the Special Issues on Ecotourism in Africa Over the Past Thirty Years,” *Journal of Ecotourism* 14, no. 2 (2016): 95–98.

This clash, therefore, is not only between environmentalisms (frameworks of nature protection), but also relates to representations of nature itself. As Robert Neuman argues, European settlers on the African continent brought with them certain ideals of nature, largely influenced by eighteenth century landscape paintings by Claude and others, subsequently imposing those aesthetic perceptions of nature onto African lands.³⁴⁸ Thus, Africa was perceived as an Eden: the “nature” to Europe’s culture. As David Anderson and Richard Grove explain, “at its crudest, Africa has been portrayed as offering the opportunity to experience a wild and natural environmental which was no longer available in the domesticated landscapes of Europe.”³⁴⁹ The reconfiguration of parts of Africa into culturally constructed ideas of nature from the colonial settlers, namely as a nature devoid of human inhabitants, profoundly changed both the material reality of the continent itself, as well the social reality of its inhabitants.

Similarly, ecomodernism as a framework of environmental care also carries with it particular ideas of nature and ecological protection that can come into conflict and clash with alternative expressions of human-nature relations. As Ariel Salleh writes, for example, the Green Economy focus of the United Nations Conference on Sustainability in 2012 was contested by “a counter-hegemonic force of environmentalists, social, feminists, peasants, and indigenous people,” culminating in a People Summit mediated by the World Social Forum in the same year, and ultimately leading to the publication of an alternative document, “Another Future is Possible,” centralized on the concept of “bio-civilization.”³⁵⁰ In this document, Salleh states that

³⁴⁸ Robert Neumann, *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

³⁴⁹ David Anderson and Richard Grove, *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 4.

³⁵⁰ Salleh, “The Green Economy: Class Hegemony and Counter Hegemony.”

The capitalist commodification of nature in notions like “climate smart” GMO agriculture was contested. Ecosystem pricing in financial initiatives like carbon trading was interrogated and the very meaning of “value” was questioned.³⁵¹

As Salleh notes, however, despite attempts to block the Green Economy frameworks, official negotiations proceeded and many aspects of the Green Economy was, and continue to be, cemented in place. Indeed, one of the primary characteristics of the opposition to these ecomodern frameworks is that it is largely based in grassroots activism, and consequently has much fewer resources than the powerfully backed ecomodern frameworks of the global North. Although supported by some Southern elites, it is notable that the conference itself, the Peoples Summit, had no corporate sponsors, a significant contrast to the UNCED conference in Rio, with corporations, such as BMW, Coca Cola, and Petrobras among the conference’s leading partners and suppliers.³⁵²

Ecomodern frameworks of the Green Economy may be also involved in the marginalization and repression of social rights in a more general sense. Critics argue, for example, that the privatization of natural resources as central to the ecomodern, and green economy approach, has resulted in a series of “green grabs,” the “appropriation of lands for environmental ends,”³⁵³ either through ecotourism, biodiversity offsetting, carbon sequestration, or biofuel production. Green grabs such as these often disrupt local property rights and community sovereignty and lead to a “restructuring of rules and authority over the access, use and management of resources, in related labour relations, and in human-ecological relationships, that may have profoundly alienating effects.”³⁵⁴ In Honduras, for example, critics of the REDD

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁵² Rio+20, Official Partnerships in Brazil for the Rio + 20 Conference, <http://www.rio20.gov.br/clientes/rio20/rio20/partners/parceiros.html>

³⁵³ Fairhead et al., “Green Grabbing: A New Appropriation of Nature.”

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 240.

framework note that it leads to an imposition of a very particular framework of property rights that clashes with the collective framework of property ownership as practiced in much of the country, as well as encouraging foreign investment that leads to both a direct and indirect loss of community sovereignty over land.³⁵⁵ Along this vein, Mary Thomas et al. argues that REDD functions as a kind of governance, a “particular framing of the problem of climate change and its solutions that validate and legitimizes specific tools, actors, and solutions while marginalizing others.”³⁵⁶ The dominant and dominating factors of this process, embedded in Western understands of property right and economic liberalism, has caused scholars and activists to describe ecomodern frameworks such of the green economy as colonial in nature, with The *Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on Climate Change*, proclaiming

After more than 500 years of resistance, we, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, peasant farmers, fisherfolk and civil society are not fooled by the so-called Green Economy and REDD+ because we know colonialism when we see it. Regardless of its cynical disguises and shameful lies, colonialism always results in the rape and pillaging of Mother Earth, and the slavery, death, destruction and genocide of her peoples. *Rio+20's Green Economy and REDD+* constitute a thinly-veiled, wicked, *colonialist planet grab* that we oppose, denounce and resist.³⁵⁷

Ecomodernism and Its Discontents

The status of ecomodernism as a powerful environmentalism presents significant concerns, therefore, with regard to the marginalization of other expressions of environmental care, as well as the marginalization of alternative ways of living and human-nature relationships.

³⁵⁵World Rainforest Movement, “REDD+ in Central America: Its Better To Ask Permission Than Forgiveness.” 21 October, 2016, <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/redd-in-central-america-its-better-to-ask-for-forgiveness-than-permission/>

³⁵⁶ Mary Thompson, Manali Baruah and Edward R. Carr, “Seeing REDD+ as a Project of Environmental Governance,” *Environmental Science and Policy* 14 (2011): 100.

³⁵⁷ World Rainforest Movement, “REDD+ in Central America: Its Better to Ask Permission Than Forgiveness.”

As I have discussed above, an increase in ecomodern frameworks has coincided with the growth in private sector actors in environmental governance, as these actors construct, support, and reproduce “private visions of the (ecological) good,” leading to significant ideological and discursive alterations in the field of environmental governance, and thus presenting a significant normative challenge to environmentalism and environmental ethics.

Ecomodernism also suffers from some conceptual issues in and of itself that may affect the satisfaction of its objective to “internalize ecological care.” Many scholars question, for example, to what extent ecomodernism represents an inauthentic form of environmentalism insofar as it is directed by the dictates of the market, rather than that of ecological concerns. Indeed, as Banerjee asks, what is being sustained in ecomodern narratives such as sustainable development? As he points out, in the Brundtland Commission, development is given priority over the environment, reflected in the statement that “environmental protection constitutes an integral part of the development process.”³⁵⁸ Yet, as he writes, “if the debate truly was about environmental and social sustainability, surely one would expect the relationship to be reversed, on the assumption that development proceeds within the constraints and limits of the biophysical environment.”³⁵⁹

Additionally, skepticism with regard to the intentions of ecomodern advocates is exacerbated by the notion that “modernism” (as it exists and is manifested today) and “ecological health” are ultimately incompatible with one other, and consequently that ecomodernism is at best a comforting rhetorical device, but little else. This is promulgated in particular by Bruno Latour,

³⁵⁸ Pratap Chatterjee & Mathias Finger, *The Earthbrokers: Power, Politics and World Development* (London: Routledge, 1994)

³⁵⁹ Banerjee, “Who Sustains Whose Development? Sustainable Development and the Reinvention of Nature.”

who has maintained famously that between modernism and ecologism, one must choose. In relation to ecomodernism, he writes:

And this is where we encounter this strange animal, rather this monster, “*ecomodernism*”, that I am not sure we should learn to love, and that triggers in me, I have to confess, a deep antipathy. To me, it sounds much like the news that an electronic cigarette is going to save a chain smoker from addiction. A great technical fix which will allow the addicted to behave just as before, except now he or she will go on with the benefit of high tech product and the happy support of his or her physician, mother and significant other. In other words, “ecomodernism” seems to me another version of having ones cake and eating it too.³⁶⁰

The notion of incompatibility is influenced predominantly by a picture of modernism that has its roots in the domination and exploitation of nature, largely for profit. As noted by Banerjee, Western discourses of development and modernity, dating back to the Enlightenment period, construct a view of nature as essentially separate from humanity, and for which humanity uses instrumentality for the purposes of civilization. He writes that the transformation of nature (depicted in European traditions as “wild, untamed”) into environment (more “manageable and goal directed”) is one of the hallmarks of modernity, in which the domination of nature becomes a key indicator of human progress.”³⁶¹ This dichotomous understanding is reproduced in ecomodern discourses and reflected in, among other things, its use of economic and instrumental language when referring to nature, such as “natural capital,” and “stock,” in addition to its suggested frameworks for ecological protection that involve, above all, the financialization of natural resources.

Further, as posited by Ariel Salleh, ecomodernism not only reproduces the dichotomous ontologies of traditional modern thought, but also perpetuates a particular understanding of

³⁶⁰ Latour, “Fifty Shades of Green.”

³⁶¹ Banerjee, “Who Sustains Whose Development? Sustainable Development and the Reinvention of Nature,” p. 150.

nature as “dead matter” that became commonplace during the European scientific revolution. Carolyn Merchant notes that with the advent of the Scientific Revolution in Europe came a mechanized nature, wherein the perception of nature was transformed from living and female, to inert and dead. This dead matter was then objectified, dissected, and exploited by scientists and industrialists for the overall benefit of humanity. Importantly, for Merchant, the perceptive shift also had ethical consequences. She stated that a perception of nature as living served as a moral constraint to human actions and the environment. She states, “one does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body, although commercial mining would soon require that.”³⁶² Conversely, however, the transformation of nature from living to inert matter served as a way to lift moral obligations towards the environment, and subsequently paved the way for a burgeoning capitalist mass appropriation of nature.

Salleh provides examples of a similar process in ecomodern discourses, arguing that populist ecomodern narratives of environmentalism both uncritically accept and reproduce these modernist notions of nature as “dead matter.”³⁶³ Salleh quotes the German Federal Minister for Environment who, in an appeal for increased ecomodern strategies of environmental protection, called Russia the “world’s filling pump” and Brazil a “raw material warehouse” and “global farmer.”³⁶⁴ This language, as she points out, is reflective of a peculiarly modern ontology towards nature, specifically, the idea of nature as a passive warehouse which is be used (i.e. cultivated) by human agents. As described by Banarjee, despite this very framework being criticized for being, in a large way, responsible for our current ecological crisis, ecomodern

³⁶² Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), p. 3.

³⁶³ Ariel Sallah, “Climate Strategy: Making the Choice between Ecological Modernization and Living Well,” *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 66 (2010): 126.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

frameworks remain entrenched in it, “plagued by the same modernistic assumptions of rationality in their reliance on scientific inquiry and the separation of people from the biophysical environment.”³⁶⁵

From this perspective, then, the extent to which ecomodern discourses can successfully internalize an ethic of care for nature in an ontology which places distinct boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, and which values nature primarily for its instrumental qualities is questionable. In many philosophical analyses of care, it is asserted that care only occurs in relationships of mutuality and dependence. As noted by White and Cuomo, for example, the ethics of care understands moral agents as “deeply and inextricably embedded in networks of ethical significant connections and conceive of caring as exercising responsibilities and virtues that maintain and positively influence relationships and general flourishing within these overlapping networks.”³⁶⁶ In ecomodern frameworks, in contrast, the internalization of care does not involve a process of embedding or of submitting the demands of the economy to the needs of the natural environment, but rather, decoupling: the process of separating the human domain from the ecological through technology and market mechanisms of ecological governance, with the end goal of perpetual economic growth and a flourishing human society disconnected from the burdens of ecological scarcity and the threat of ecological destruction. The process of decoupling, thus, involves a primacy on strict anthropocentric, and specifically, economic needs. As Mol, Sonnefeld, and Spaargaren maintain, ecological needs are only brought in when

³⁶⁵ Banerjee, “Who Sustains Whose Development? Sustainable Development and the Reinvention of Nature,” p. 153.

³⁶⁶ Kyle Powys Whyte and Chris Cuomo, “Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies,” in Stephen M. Gardiner and Allen Thompson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

“environmental criteria, instruments, and concepts are reformulated to mesh with the logics of market mechanisms.”³⁶⁷

Alternatives to Ecomodernism

One alternative to the dominant ecomodern model is the notion of “buen vivir,” as developed at the People’s World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth 2010 in Bolivia in 2010. The goal of the conference was to establish an alternative development model, a model of climate justice, which challenged the hegemony of capital characteristic of modern economies. Unlike ecomodern accounts, the People’s Agreement understood the capitalist model as a primary cause of climate change and climate injustice through its imposition of the “logic of competition, progress, and limitless growth.” They put forth a new model which promoted

The recovery, revalorization, and strengthening of the knowledge, wisdom, and ancestral practices of the Indigenous Peoples, which are affirmed in the thought and living practices of Living Well,’ recognizing Mother Earth as a living being with which we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary, and spiritual relationship.

Central to this model, therefore, is the notion of “buen vivir”—living well. The framework of “buen vivir” problematizes a strictly anthropocentric and dichotomous human/nature ontology. In the preamble to the conference, it was stated, “we are all valuable, we all have a space, duties and responsibilities. We all need everybody else.”³⁶⁸ Furthermore, against the epistemological hegemonies of the West, it reaffirms the necessity to “recognize the

³⁶⁷ Arthur Mol, David A. Sonnenfeld, and Gert Spaargaren, “Ecological Modernisation: Three Decades of Policy, Practice, and Theoretical Reflection,” in Arthur P. J. Mol, David A. Sonnenfeld, and Gert Spaargaren, eds., *The Ecological Modernization Reader: Environmental Reform in Theory and in Practice* (London: Routledge, 2009) p. 5.

³⁶⁸ Evo Morales, “People’s World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights,” Cochabamba, 19-22 April, 2010.

plurality of forms of knowledge and ancestral practices, and transform scientific practices based on control over nature toward paradigms oriented toward equilibrium with nature.”³⁶⁹ On a practical level, the conference critiqued many of the novel market mechanisms of ecological protection, including REDD+, and advocated for more stringent regulations of corporate activities, and called for more holistic mechanism of environmental governance, including a reevaluation of methods of valuing nature and life, the incorporation of methods of sustainability of indigenous groups, and a critique of consumerism.

What these, and many other ecological frameworks point to, then, are alternative environmental expressions and forms of environmental and cultural care. As I have noted in this chapter, however, the nature of ecomodernism as *powerful* environmentalism, as a paradigm that is produced and reproduced by dominant and elite actors, presents problems of hegemony within environmentalism; problems which are, thus far, underexplored in the literature. Ecomodernism gains its power *from*, not in spite of, its complicit-ness in dominant institutions, and as such, necessarily serves the interests of the agents that actively produce and reproduce it. Conversely, non-dominant ecological paradigms are marginalized in the wake of an increasing ecomodernism that is understood as the sole legitimate means of environmental protection.³⁷⁰ This marginalization can be manifested on a practical level, as mentioned above in discussions of funding, but it also occurs on an epistemological level in terms of which forms of environmentalism are acceptable. As Scott Lash et al. write in *Risk, Environment, and Modernity*, ecomodernism constitutes “a new dominant paradigm in the politics of the

³⁶⁹ CMPCC (2010a) Final Conclusions, Working Group 13: Intercultural Dialogue to Share Knowledge, Skills and Technologies, World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, Cochabamba, April, <https://pwccc.wordpress.com/2010/04/29/final-conclusions-working-group13-intercultural-dialogue-to-share-knowledge-skills-and-technologies/>.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

environment—that is, a new *truth* of growth and sustainability.”³⁷¹ This “truth” of ecomodernism, however, if hegemonic, may represent a restrictive and exclusionary type of environmental expression that, as stated by McLaughlin, could lead to the “marginaliz[ation] of people and projects who depart from that vision by conceptualizing them as deviant, backward, or irrational.”³⁷²

The issue of recognition and representation in environmentalism is thus, a crucial one. Of primary importance is to understand and analyze the question of *who*, what groups, parties, and interests are defining and representing nature and nature protection in contemporary environmental governance—and *how*, how are these dominant forms of ecological protection satisfying, or not satisfying, the ultimate goals of the environmental movement: to live in a sustainable and harmonious manner with nonhuman nature, as much as possible, and to create safe living conditions for present and future humans.

I have demonstrated in this dissertation that private sector actors in environmental governance present significant challenges to the mainstream environmental movement, both on a practical and normative level. Powerful environmental frameworks, such as ecomodernism, are supported, constructed, and reproduced by private sector actors and institutions, undergirded by frameworks of corporate social responsibility that place a primacy on voluntary partnerships, cooperation and sponsorships, rather than in the acceptance of external regulation. In the words of George Holmes, private sector engagement and eco-philanthropy “neoliberalizes environmentalism, creating “market friendly environmentalisms that do not challenge the

³⁷¹ Bronislaw Szerszynski, Scott Lash and Brian Wynne, “Introduction: Ecology, Realism, and the Social Sciences,” in S. Lash, B. Szerszynski, and B. Wynne, ed., *Risk, Environment and Modernity: Toward a New Ecology*, (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 1-26, p. 19.

³⁷² McLaughlin, “Ecological Modernization in Evolutionary Perspective,” p. 180.

capitalist order.”³⁷³ As private sector engagement increases in environmentalism, therefore, a central question remains. In particular, what might a democratic environmental movement look like, where the voices of powerful actors are equal to the voices of the less powerful?

³⁷³ George Holmes, “Biodiversity for Billionaires.”

CHAPTER 7

TWO MANIFESTOS: FREEDOM VERSUS HARMONY

Two manifestos of sort were published in 2015. One, “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” was written by a group of economists, environmental scientists, philanthropists, filmmakers, and philosophers, and published by the Breakthrough Institute.³⁷⁴ The second, “Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home,” was written by Pope Francis.³⁷⁵ Both manifestos are an expression of concern for environmental degradation, and both manifestos propose solutions and future objectives. Both, in a sense, provide a “vision” of what a sustainable, healthy, world would look like, and include a focus on both humans and nature to varying degrees. Despite broad similarities in intent, however, the two manifestos promulgate radically different notions of ecological care and ecological well-being. While “Laudato Si” places an emphasis on spiritual, social, and cultural change, such foci are almost entirely absent in “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” which, instead, is almost entirely concentrated on technological development. What emerges from a close reading of the two, therefore, are two distinct ideas of ecological reform, and two distinct environmental (and social) ethics.

Two Different Ideas of the Present (Crisis)

The two manifestos express wildly divergent interpretations of our current ecological and social crises, embedded in contrasting interpretations of the present in a more general sense. In *An Ecomodernist Manifesto*, the present crisis is primarily an ecological crisis, or more precisely,

³⁷⁴ John Asafu-Adjaye, Linus Blomqvist, Stewart Brand, Barry Brook, Ruth de Fries, Erle Ellis, Christopher Foreman, David Keith, Martin Lewis, Mark Lynas, Ted Nordhaus, Roger Pielke, Jr., Rachel Pritzker, Joyashree Roy, Mark Sagoff, Michael Shellenberger, Robert Stone, and Peter Teague, “An Ecomodernist Manifesto” April 15, 2015, <http://www.ecomodernism.org/manifesto>.

³⁷⁵ Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter Laudato Si of The Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home,” *Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana* (2015): 1-184.

a crisis of resources. We are in, according to the authors, the Anthropocene, a time of profound human led change and consequent pressure on natural ecosystems. Currently, over fifty percent of current land on the planet is used for human activity, namely, for food production and industrial activity. Twenty percent of original forested area has been depleted and converted for human use, and the planet is undergoing a mass extinction event, as “populations of many mammals, amphibians, and birds have declined by more than 50 percent in the past 40 years alone.”³⁷⁶

While natural life may be disadvantaged from encroaching human activity, however, the authors maintain that human life and societies, in contrast, are flourishing. They state, for example, that “violence in all forms has declined significantly and is probably at the lowest per capita level ever experienced by the human species.”³⁷⁷ In addition, humans now enjoy growing freedoms, both personally and at a governmental level, as “personal, economic, and personal liberties have spread worldwide and are today largely accepted as universal truths.”³⁷⁸ Women, in particular, are liberated from traditional and restricting gender roles due to modernization, and consequently have more control of their fertility. Similarly, modernization has led to “large number of numbers of humans — both in percentage and in absolute terms — [being] free from insecurity, penury and servitude.”³⁷⁹

In “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” therefore, the message is that although environmental degradation is increasing, the quality of human societies and human lives, are gradually *improving* as modern medicine, science, and technology liberates people from the toils

³⁷⁶ Asafu-Adjaye et al., "An Ecomodernist Manifesto," p. 7.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

associated with premodern life. They write happily that the gifts of modernization have granted people freedom from the land, stating that while in 1880, fifty percent of people “worked the land,” now that number has reduced to only two percent of the world’s population.³⁸⁰ Further, urbanization has led to lower fertility rates, increased development, and an overall higher quality of life. Technology has saved innumerable lives, and increased agricultural intensity has fed millions. The Anthropocene, in other words, despite its ecological difficulties, is a golden era for human existence.

In “*Laudato Si*,” however, the picture painted of the present is significantly different. In Pope Francis’ account, the optimism of modernity embedded in the former manifesto is absent, replaced by a profound concern regarding the stark realities of industrial progress. He discusses the pollution faced by many communities as a result of modern industrial activity, as well as the extreme wealth inequality faced globally. He points out, for example, that “inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries,” continuing that a “true ecological debt exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances . . . and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries.”³⁸¹ Further, he asserts that environmental degradation is not antithetical to, nor separate from, human social degradation, as was suggested in the former account. Rather, he speaks of the cultural degradation that occurs *alongside* ecosystem degradation, as “environmental exploitation . . . not only exhausts the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood, but also undoes the social structure which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community.”³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁸¹ Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*,” p. 21.

³⁸² Ibid., p. 34.

In “*Laudato Si*,” then, the idea that human and ecosystem health can exist somewhat separately from one another is replaced by a profound sense of interconnectedness, embedded in the idea that human nature and nature in general terms have a connected fate. When nature suffers, so do humans. For Pope Francis, therefore, “ecological justice is social justice,” elaborating that “today ... we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*.”³⁸³ This is apparent also on the level of the individual as he argues that not only is the current ecological crisis a crisis of culture, but it is also an individual and spiritual crisis, as the rupture between humanity and nature is also a rupture within humanity itself, and primarily, a rupture from God. He states, for example:

[T]he originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. *Gen* 3:17-19). It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.³⁸⁴

The Human-Nature Connection

In “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” as the present situation is good for humans, but more negative for nature, the objective is to “decouple” human impacts from ecological wellbeing. Decoupling is, arguably, the central idea in the manifesto, and it refers to the process of separating human impact from nonhuman ecosystems. Cities, for example, are the perfect symbolic representation of decoupling, according to the authors, as they allow large amounts of

³⁸³ Ibid., p. 50.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

people to converge in small areas of land, leaving much free space to “re-wild” and “re-green.” Thus, many humans can continue to live, and thrive, in cities while nature does not have to bear the brunt of the impact. Other examples are electric cars and carbon capture units; things that, with technological advancements, can provide and maintain human well-being without the ecological cost. In fact, the authors deny the idea almost entirely that there are limits to (human) growth, a notion first popularized in the early environmental movement, stating that there is “remarkably little evidence that human population and economic expansion will outstrip the capacity to grow food or procure critical material resources in the foreseeable future,” and “to the degree to which there are fixed physical boundaries to human consumption, they are so theoretical as to be functionally irrelevant.”³⁸⁵

The representation of nature here, therefore, is primarily separatist. At a very blunt level, human development—through increased development and technology—can, and should, isolate itself from nature. This separatist paradigm is evident in the language that is used to describe the natural world, referred to mostly as “resource” or “environment.” And it is also present in the way that nature is referred to in the modernism framework. “Modernization processes,” they assert, “have increasingly liberated humanity from nature.”³⁸⁶ Liberation from nature, according to authors, is a positive development, and should be continued into the future, albeit with a greater recognition of ecological consequences.

The ideal human-nature relationship, therefore, is one of efficiency and decoupling, and they assert that “humanity’s goal should be to use resources more productively.”³⁸⁷ Further, the notion that there are no fixed physical boundaries to human consumption is, primarily, a question

³⁸⁵ Asafu-Adjaye et al., “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” p. 12.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

of human need. The boundaries that might emerge from a moral relationship to parts of nonhuman nature that are not directly necessary for human survival and consumption are not mentioned or discussed. Indeed, apart from mentions of the “aesthetic” and “spiritual” values some people may glean from nature, nature itself is largely treated instrumentally, and questions of normative relations with nature not addressed.

In “*Laudato Si*,” in contrast, the human-nature relationship is referred to in ideal terms as a fraternity; a broken relationship that must be healed. Pope Francis claims, for example, that “it is not enough . . . to think of different species merely as potential resources to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves.”³⁸⁸ Rather, nature, according to Pope Francis, is “sister, “mother,” “brother,” and it is an expression of divinity and “joyful mystery.”³⁸⁹

Part of the healing process with nature, then, is not to decouple but rather to *re-engage* with the reality of inherent interconnectedness. He maintains that although there have been “misinterpretations” of the Christian doctrine in the past, “nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.”³⁹⁰ The attitude of domination and mastery which has informed much of the last two thousand years must be exchanged for kinship, according to Pope Francis; now, we must “speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world.” Indeed, as stated in the manifesto, the most important recognition is that we *are*

³⁸⁸ Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*,” p. 80.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

nature, stating “the book of nature is one and indivisible, and includes the environment, life, sexuality, the family, social relations, and so forth.”³⁹¹

Thus, for Pope Francis, the ecological crisis is directly linked to our disconnection from nature, and our consequent abuse and exploitation of natural areas. The extent to which the human-nature connection has been ruptured is summarized in the opening quotes of the manifesto:

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (*Rom* 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. *Gen* 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.³⁹²

Where We Go from Here

The solution in “An Ecomodernist Manifesto” is further decoupling. This is achieved, primarily, through increased modernization and technological advances. The authors state, for example, “that decoupling human well-being from the destruction of nature requires the conscious acceleration of *emergence decoupling processes*.”³⁹³ These emergent decoupling includes “urbanization, aquaculture, agricultural intensification, nuclear power, and desalination,” all of which are processes with a “demonstrated potential to reduce human demands on the environmental, allowing more room for non-human species.”³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid., p. 2.

³⁹³ Asafu-Adjaye et al., “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” p. 22.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

Ultimately, they argue, therefore, that “modern technologies, by using natural ecosystem flows and services more efficiently, offer a real chance of reducing the totality of human impacts on the biosphere.”³⁹⁵ As modernization has generally brought positives to human existence, a change in lifestyle, consumption and habits is not required. Indeed, they repeatedly emphasize the benefits of modernity, and the decoupling potential that modernity has brought, even suggesting that although the common assumption is that previous cultures have lived in harmony with their harmony, that has only been the case because they have had smaller population—“insofar as past societies had less impact upon the environment, it was because those societies supported vastly smaller populations.”³⁹⁶ The problem, now and in the past, they assert, is human *dependence* on ecosystems. The solution, therefore, is the creation of technologies to lessen that dependence. Importantly, however, if there is a situation where development and human growth clashes with ecological health, the former should be given precedence, even if that mean continued fossil fuel use. They state, for example:

Climate change and other global ecological challenges are not the most important immediate concerns for the majority of the world’s people. Nor should they be. A new coal-fired power station in Bangladesh may bring air pollution and rising carbon dioxide emissions but will also save lives. For millions living without light and forced to burn dung to cook their food, electricity and modern fuels, no matter the source, offer a pathway to a better life, even as they also bring new environmental challenges.³⁹⁷

To focus on technology, however, according to Pope Francis, is to “deal only in symptoms.”³⁹⁸ Real change, in contrast, is to eliminate the “structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economics, and correct models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 10.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁹⁸ Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter Laudato Si,” p. 13

respect for the environment.”³⁹⁹ Only when we address consumerism, greed, and our conceptual and ontological distance with nature can have a sustainable future. Indeed, to be ecological, according to Pope Francis is to:

Replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God’s world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion.⁴⁰⁰

Further, change consists of changing ourselves and our relationship with other humans and non-human nature. Quoting St. Benedict, he states, “The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves.”⁴⁰¹ The objective, then, to reinvigorate the bond between the humans and the nonhuman, which will lead, necessarily, to ecological care and a radically different way of life—“if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously.”⁴⁰²

Concluding Remarks

It is apparent, therefore, that both manifestos express radically different environmental ethics. “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” like ecomodernism more broadly, professes an optimism in technological ability to redirect current human trajectories, a commitment to human (economic) freedom and a dedication to market growth, all of which are embedded in abstract and instrumental perceptions of nature, expressed fully in the metaphor of “decoupling.” In

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 18.

contrast, Pope Francis in “Laudato Si” understands the ecological problem as a social, cultural, and a spiritual crisis. Nature, in “Laudato Si,” is not an abstract service-provider, but “mother,” “sister.” Ecological issues, in the latter account, arise not from an economic miscalculation or not yet developed technology, but from a profound social and spiritual sickness, related to inaccurate human ontologies and human desires. As such, the solution is a radical change in the way societies and individuals relate to nature, towards a relation of harmony.

In many ways, therefore, the two manifestos represent a kind of classic divide in environmental thought: the divide between intrinsic and instrumental value. Whereas Pope Francis vehemently upholds the idea of the intrinsic value of nature and critiques the anthropocentrism and mastery of Western relations to nature, “An Ecomodernist Manifesto” maintains and reproduces these tendencies, upholding the ideals of modernity, market growth, and technological development as ways out of the ecological crisis, with no apparent concern for the value of nature distinct from human needs and wants.

As discussed in this dissertation, however, not all normative frameworks are created equally. The vast powers behind powerful environmentalisms, such as ecomodernism, facilitated by growing private sector engagement in the realm of environmental politics via frameworks of philanthropy and corporate social responsibility, creates situations of ideological dominance, where one environmental agenda has significantly more resources than others and is put forth as the common sense, or indeed, the “pragmatic” way forward. Through a convergence of elite actors in environmental politics, and an ever-growing fluidity between public and private spheres characteristic of neoliberal economies, private sector actors can exert substantial ideological influence in environmental politics, normalizing capitalist interactions and institutionalizing organizational norms and codes of conduct. Many of these engagements represent “hegemonic”

action in the Gramscian sense, which serve to marginalize and suppress counter-hegemonic visions, including different expressions of environmental care and environmental identity as put forth by indigenous groups and other less “powerful” communities. In addition, as I maintained in chapter 3, this kind of influence is facilitated and exacerbated by normative assumptions about ideal business-society relations, reflected most notably in the “stewardship ethic” which positions corporate actors in positions of significant influence and allows the private sector the normative tools in which to keep CSR practices voluntary, as well as reduce external regulation in a more general way.

The influence enacted by the private sector is problematic for two main reasons, as I discussed in chapter 4 and 6 respectively. First, private sector engagement in environmentalism through CSR and philanthropy has the potential to “greenwash” the environmental agenda by detracting and diverting attention away from the actual exploitative activities of the companies involved. As stated by Behroodi Morvaridi “the capacity of big business to modify its discourse is often considerably greater than its capacity to improve its social and environmental impacts.”⁴⁰³ These kinds of engagements, through cultivating the image of a “moral corporation,” can increase corporate sovereignty and in doing so, exacerbate the negative impacts related to corporate activity. Indeed, degrading labor standards and increased amounts of environmental pollution are often associated with market liberalization and less stringent state regulation.⁴⁰⁴ This can lead, then, to bizarre situations where companies are considered “ethical” from the perspective of the CSR community, but are actually among the highest polluters, as was demonstrated in the Volkswagen scandal of 2015. This kind of circumstance is particularly

⁴⁰³ Behrooz Morvaridi, “Capitalist Philanthropy and the Green Revolution,” *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 19, no. 2 (2012): 243-256.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

worrying given the frequent positioning of CSR as an “alternative to law” and the dominant understanding of CSR as a voluntary and self-regulatory mechanism.

Second, engagement of this kind can create conflicts of interests where “less powerful” views are marginalized in wake of an ever-increasing convergence of elite actors in environmental governance. This is problematic from the perspective of an environmentalism that seeks to have fair and democratic representation. Indeed, environmental beliefs, and the policies that arise from them, affect everyone. It is also problematic given that elite and powerful actors tend to have a vested interest in maintaining the norms and institutional arrangement that made them powerful in the first place; but these norms and arrangements may also be, in some situations, the very ones that are significantly contributing to our worst ecological problems.

Thus, to have more forms of democratic environmental governance, a move from corporate patronage and voluntary benevolence to one of *corporate accountability*, which sees corporations engage in social responsibility frameworks that are publically informed and entail legal consequences, is one possible solution. As Morvaridi writes, “the rights and freedoms of companies must be balanced not just by responsibilities and voluntary initiatives but also obligations.”⁴⁰⁵ Some recent proposals have been made to usher in a “post-voluntarist” CSR framework that include a focus on a transparency measures, complaints procedures, and “hard law” mechanisms that “lays down obligation, international standards, rewards, and penalties in relation to corporate accountability, and performance.”⁴⁰⁶

One example is in the work of environmental organization, Friends of the Earth. They have outlined a series of recommendations for the resistance of “corporate capture” in

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Peter Utting, “Corporate Responsibility and the Movement of Business,” *Development in Practice* 15, no. 3 and 4 (2005): 375-388.

mainstream environmentalism and the United Nations. Acknowledging that the “Convention on Biological Diversity is driven by corporate actors interested in the financialization of nature and not by the need to conserve biodiversity;” that private sectors interests are “increasingly seeking ways to treat water as a tradable commodity;” and that United Nations has been “working very closely with big business in developing and promoting the concept of ‘Green Economy,’”⁴⁰⁷ they are campaigning for legal framework in which to make private sector actors and interests more accountable and restrict corporate influence in environmental policy. Similar to Utting’s framework, they maintain that communities should have “rights over the resources they need to enjoy a full and healthy life,” and that corporations must “meet the best environmental, social, labor, and human rights standards wherever they operate.”⁴⁰⁸ To enforce the latter point more strongly, they proposed that the World Summit on Sustainable Development ought to put into place a Corporate Accountability Convention that would “enforce minimum environmental and social standards, encourage effective reporting, and provide incentives of corporations taking steps to avoid negative impacts.”⁴⁰⁹

More specifically with regard to private sector interest in international environmental meetings and negotiations, Friends of the Earth suggested that the UN reduce the dominant position given to private sector groups in environmental governance by stopping governments set up discussion bodies that “grant business a privileged status within official negotiations, such as the Mexican dialogues on climate policy,” as well as taking action to “strengthen transparency around lobbying and ensure that no business groups are given privileged access over UN policy-

⁴⁰⁷ Friends of the Earth International, “Reclaim the UN from Corporate Capture,” 19 June, 2012, <http://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Reclaim-the-UN.pdf>, p. 5.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁰⁹ Utting, “Corporate Responsibility and the Movement of Business,” p. 385.

making.”⁴¹⁰ Further, they state that “as the business sector holds significantly larger resources than any other sector, there should be a cap on its participation: business should not have more representatives than any of the major groups in multilateral negotiation processes.”⁴¹¹ Other recommendations they outline recommend include that the UN discloses all existing ties to private sector groups, that a code of conduct for UN officials that involves “a cooling off period which officials cannot start working for lobby groups,” and that the UN should set in place legally behind, non-voluntary frameworks of corporate accountability which include “obligations for companies to report on their social and environmental impacts.”⁴¹²

In addition to Friends of the Earth, many other organizations are active in their advocacy for more stringent forms of corporate accountability. Several trade unions and social NGOs in the USA, for example, have begun an International Right to Know campaign to advocate for legislation that would force corporations traded on the US stock exchanges to “disclose information on the operations of their overseas affiliates and major contractors.”⁴¹³ The International Forum on Globalization has also called for the establishment of a UN Organization for Corporate Accountability that would “provide information on corporate practices as a basis for legal actions and consumer boycotts.”⁴¹⁴ Further, Christian Aid has advocated for a Global Regulation Authority that would “establish norms for TNC conduct, monitor compliance, and deal with breaches.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁰ Friends of the Earth International, “Reclaim the UN from Corporate Capture.”

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Utting, “Corporate Responsibility and the Movement of Business,” p. 385.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

Further, factors for a fair CSR policy that is embedded in corporate accountability rather than corporate responsibility ought to outline the necessary *conditions* for partnership and sponsorship deals to avoid conflicts of interest and issues of potential domination. There are rules in place, for example, against political lobbying with an understanding of these problems; however, similar rules do not exist with regard to corporate sponsorship and patronage to social movement organizations. There are significantly less transparency laws, however, that oblige a social movement organization to publicly disclose how much they received from a particular private sector group, nor are there limits on amounts that may be received. Additionally, there are no mechanisms in place that focus specifically on the ethics of private sector sponsors sitting on the board of directors for NGOs, or in other top managerial positions. Given the urgency of ecological issues, and the centrality of NGOs in responding to local and global ecological and social problems, the influence afforded “sponsors” of such groups focusing on such issues ought to be a significant area of concern.

Frameworks of corporate accountability, therefore, are very different from the current norms of CSR and private sector philanthropy. As stated by Utting, “rather than placing the emphasis on moral compulsion, by saying corporations should assume responsibility for their actions, it suggests that they have to answer to their stakeholders and be held to account through some element of punishment or sanction.”⁴¹⁶ As I discussed in this dissertation, however, mechanisms of accountability and answerability are exceedingly different to enforce, both because of practical limitations (the penetration of corporate actors and interests in political institutions and public policy) and ideological barriers (the underlying normative frameworks in existence with regard to “ideal” business-society relations, i.e., ideas of corporate “stewardship,

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p. 386.

etc.). From a Gramscian perspective, then, the ideological and practical tools at the disposal of many private sector actors to exert and maintain dominance relates to the practice of hegemonic power in a more general sense. For Gramsci, hegemonic power is reproduced in a dialectic relationship with counter-hegemonic contestation—“hegemony and counter-hegemony exist in a state of tension; each gives shape to the other.”⁴¹⁷ For the dominant classes, the primary objective is to conserve a degree of ideological unity in which to maintain the consent of the dominated classes. For the subaltern groups, however, the focus is on resisting the ideological domination of the ruling class through a deconstruction of common sense and the creation of an alternative vision of social life. From the perspective of corporate accountability, then, attempts to bring about effective corporate accountability laws must interact with the practical and political aspects of corporate dominance, as well as the normative assumptions embedded in capitalist enterprise that aid in that dominance.

Finally, a democratic environmentalism must be a pluralistic one. Environmental beliefs about the value of nature, and ontological understandings of relationships between humans and non-human nature, are inherently pluralistic, place-based, and geographically and culturally dependent. The universalizing tendencies, inherent in both environmental policy and environmental ethics, are, therefore, problematic as they detract from individual and cultural experiential understandings of self, nature, and community. Thus, although a degree of universality is needed in order to enact policy at a national and international level, facilitating a plurality of beliefs that correspond with the daily experiences of people is crucial in order to have environmental governance that recognizes and represents a diverse array of people and cultures.

⁴¹⁷ Stoddart, “Ideology, Hegemony, Discourse: A Critical Review of Theories of Knowledge and Power,” p. 202.

Further research, then, could focus on the political, economic, and normative conditions for the establishment of a more democratic environmental politics, as well as conditions for a fairer and non-dominant eco-philanthropy and CSR. Ultimately, research of this nature must continue to take into account that ideological positions relating to environmental norms and values cannot be separated from analyses of political economy. There is a tendency in traditional philosophical work to treat ideologies as separate from broader political and economic context, rather than understand them as inherently situated in political-economic contexts, and reproduced by actors with varying levels of power and intent. This is witnessed especially in traditional debates with regard to the intrinsic and instrumental value of nature that largely feature no mention of political-economy or the social forces behind particular ideological frameworks. Thus, what I have suggested in this dissertation is that the much commented on growth in novel forms of instrumental environmental ideologies, reflected in the popularization of “new” environmentalism, “new” conservation, the Green Economy, and contemporary manifestations of ecomodernism, reflects not only changing environmental norms, but are also related to changes in environmental governance. In other words, the growth of powerful environmentalisms cannot be separated from the rise of powerful actors in mainstream environmentalism.

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